THE POEMS OF NIZAMI

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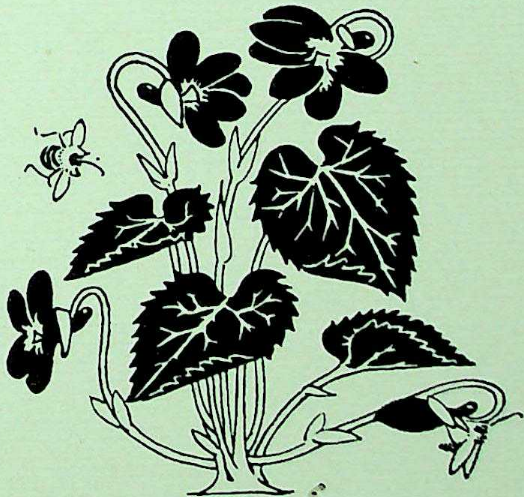
DESCRIBED BY LAURENCE BINYON



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THE EDITOR DESIRES TO EXPRESS HIS THANKS TO THE AUTHORITIES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM WHO HAVE KINDLY PERMITTED THESE PAINTINGS AND DECORATIONS TO BE REPRODUCED AND HAVE COURTEOUSLY AFFORDED EVERY FACILITY TO THE COLOUR ENGRAVERS. THE EDITOR IS PARTICULARLY INDEBTED TO DR. BARNETT FOR HIS PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

THE MANUSCRIPT

THE glories of Persian painting are illustrations to manuscripts. They are, therefore, comparatively little known. Independent paintings, of small dimensions, were also made; but before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these were exceptional. Under the Moghul emperors at Delhi such miniatures became common; and these Moghul paintings, modelled at first on Persian style, are frequently confused with Persian work, so that many people acquire their notions of Persian painting almost solely from Indian derivatives. Meanwhile, the classics of Persian art, adorning the pages of manuscripts, remain unfamiliar to the world outside the small circle of collectors and students. Hidden in libraries, public or private, they demand the most delicate handling, and can be shown but coyly, if shown at all, a page at a time in a glass case. For the most part they can be found only by exploration. Not all libraries are catalogued: and the cataloguers of Persian manuscripts are usually more interested in literature than in art: their descriptions are apt to tell us little about the paintings and less about their comparative quality and importance. It is useless to deplore these conditions; they are inevitable. But they serve to explain why Persian painting has received less than its due from the world at large.

The manuscript of Nizami's Poems containing the miniatures here reproduced is well known to students of Persian art. Dr. F. R. Martin, in his "Miniature Painting of Persia, India and Turkey"—the first work to make known the range and the real achievements of Persian artists—calls it "the finest sixteenth-century Persian manuscript in existence." The manuscript was bought for the British Museum in 1880.[1] It consists of three hundred and ninety-six leaves, on both sides of which the poems have been written in a fine hand, in the style called "Nastaliq." The paper is fairly thick, of a mellow ivory tone. It was the custom to prepare the paper for the brush by polishing it with an egg-shaped crystal. It is smooth and delightful to the touch.

Each page is decorated on the broad margins with designs painted in two tones of gold, one paler than the other and slightly greenish. These designs contain no human figures, but all kinds of animals and birds among foliage and flowers. Similar motives are repeated, but no two pages are exactly alike. Occasionally the decoration takes the form of a symmetrical pattern of floral ornament and birds; but usually it is a free design. Sometimes it is a page of wild life in happiness: among slender cypresses or blossoming trees are birds and beasts, foxes, hares, deer, bears, monkeys, resting or at play. But generally the wild animals are fighting or preying on each other; lions, tigers or leopards leap upon antelopes or oxen: hawks bear down herons from the air. Now and then the artists painted hoofs and horns in silver; this has now gone black. It is the same with the springs and rivulets which occasionally flow among the flowers and shrubs.

It is remarkable to what an extent fabulous creatures are mixed among the real animals. These seem to be all borrowed from Chinese art. There are dragons, "phœnixes," and animals with flames or flame-like growths sprouting from their shoulders. Towards the end of the volume the workmanship in these marginal decorations becomes a little less choice and careful.

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[1] C. Rieu: Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum, 1879-1883.

At the beginning of the manuscript there is a double page with two arabesque designs, medallions with twelve points like a star, patterned in blue and gold, picked out with red and green.

Next come two full-page arabesque designs of the same character, enclosing the title and an inscription in praise of the writing and decoration of the book, "the like of which the eye of Time never beheld."

There are illuminated headings to the several poems, and other ornaments. On the last page is a pretty tailpiece, a design of violets and bees on a gold ground. But the main splendour of the manuscript is in the full-page paintings inserted as illustrations of the poems. There are fourteen of these, made at the time when the manuscript was written, and three others, not reproduced here, which were painted about a century and a half later, in a totally different style, strongly influenced by European art.

For some reason, which can only be conjectured, the illustration of the book was never completed. There are no paintings at all to illustrate the last of the poems, the Book of Alexander.

The manuscript was written by a celebrated scribe, Shah Mahmud Nishapuri. The execution of the work occupied four years. It was begun in 1539 and finished in 1543. It was made at Tabriz for Tahmasp, the reigning Shah of Persia. It was still in the royal collection at the end of the eighteenth century, for Shah Fath Ali, who came to the throne in 1797, had it bound with covers on which are two paintings of himself, remarkable for a beautiful black beard which waves in the wind, hunting the lion. These painted and varnished covers had become so damaged through the pigment flaking off, and were in so delicate a condition, that they were removed and are now preserved apart, while the manuscript has been re-bound.

SHAH TAHMASP AND HIS PAINTERS

SHAH TAHMASP was the son and successor of Ismail, the founder of the Safavid dynasty of Persian kings. Ismail was a great ruler, and the idol of the nation because directly descended from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. Tahmasp was of an inferior mould, sensual and avaricious, through not without martial virtues. A portrait of him as a smooth-cheeked youth, with thick eyebrows meeting over his eyes, is reproduced by Martin (Plate 110), who also gives a picture of the Shah in the centre of a magnificent hunting-scene. Later, he wore a beard. Tahmasp had a troubled reign. He came to the throne in 1524, and soon had to make war on the Uzbegs for the recovery of Baghdad. In 1533 his dominions were invaded by the Ottoman Turks, and Baghdad was again taken from him by Sulaiman (Solyman) the Great. Two of his brothers in succession rebelled against him and in 1548 he was again at war with Turkey. In 1559 the son of the Turkish emperor, who had risen in rebellion, fled to Persia, where Tahmasp welcomed him and promised him an asylum, but when an emissary was sent to demand the young prince, the Shah, in fear of the power of the Turks, betrayed and surrendered him.

Another who, at an earlier time, had taken refuge at the Court of Tahmasp was Humayun, the Moghul emperor who had been driven out of India in 1540, and was biding his time in exile. Humayun's sojourn had consequences which powerfully affected the art of painting in India; for, seeing at the Persian court so many fine painters at work, he was filled with emulation and the desire to surround himself, when he had recovered his throne at Delhi, with a similar circle of artists. In 1550 he was at Kabul, and from there he invited one of the group of artists who illustrated our MS., Mir Sayyid Ali, to come to him, and gave him the commission to illustrate the Romance of Hamzah.[2] Some of the paintings made for this manuscript still exist, chiefly in Vienna and in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and are the earliest works of the Moghul School. They seem to have been largely executed by assistants of the Persian master.

Of Shah Tahmasp in his later years we have a glimpse through the eyes of the first Englishman to reach Persia overland, Anthony Jenkinson.[3] Jenkinson was sent to Russia by the Muscovy Company in 1557, by way of the White Sea, to promote the trade with England. He was well received by the Tsar, Ivan the Terrible; and, furnished by him with letters of recommendation, proceeded down the Volga to the Caspian, with the object of reaching China. He journeyed as far as Bokhara, where he was obliged to turn back. In 1561 he was again sent out, to try and open trade with Persia. He carried letters from Queen Elizabeth to the "Great Sophi" or Shah, and travelling by way of Moscow, reached the Court of Shah Tahmasp, then at Kasvin (Casbeen), in November, 1568. Delivering his letters and presents, Jenkinson was asked by Tahmasp what country he was of. He answered that he was of the famous City of London within the noble realm of England, and was sent by Elizabeth, Queen of the said realm. The Shah plied him with many questions, and finally asked him of his religion. When Jenkinson proudly professed his Christian faith, the Shah was shocked beyond measure. "Thou unbeliever," he cried, "we have no need of friendship with unbelievers," and dismissed him forthwith from his presence. "I being glad thereof," writes Jenkinson, "did reverence and went my way." To prevent contamination by infidel feet, a servant went before him with a basin of sand, which he strewed upon his path.

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[2] See Percy Brown's "Indian Painting under the Mughals," 1924, and Heinrich Glück: "Die Indischen Miniaturen des Hæmze-Romanes," 1925.

[3] See the Hakluyt Society's publication: "Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia" by Anthony Jenkinson. Edited by E. Delmar Morgan and C. H. Coote, 1886.

Though Tahmasp was so anxious to escape corruption by intercourse with infidel England, he could not foresee that he was destined to be immortalised, or at least embedded, in classic English verse. For he is the Sophi who makes a transitory appearance in one of Milton's spacious similes in "Paradise Lost."

When utmost hell is left desert by the heaven-banished host, it is

> As when the Tartar from his Russian foe,
> By Astracan, over the snowy plains,
> Retires, or Bactrian Sophi, from the horns
> Of Turkish crescent, leaves all waste beyond
> The realm of Aladule in his retreat
> To Tauris or Casbeen.

Tahmasp does not appear as a great man or an attractive character. But he had aesthetic tastes and, in his earlier manhood especially, he was a liberal patron of art. We owe him gratitude for commissioning such splendid manuscripts as this, and that other great manuscript—a Shah Namah, dated 1537—containing the prodigious number of 256 miniatures, now in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild at Paris.

Who were the artists commissioned to illustrate our Nizami? The names of five painters are written on or underneath eleven of the fourteen miniatures. In one case only does the inscription appear to be the signature of the artist: this is the picture of "Nushirwan and the Owls" (Plate III), which is signed by Mirak. This master's name occurs on four other paintings (Plates VIII, IX, X, XIII), but these inscriptions are in a different hand from the signature and are not all in the same hand: they were certainly put on afterwards. So too with the names of the other artists: they are records or ascriptions, not signatures. The probability is, however, that they are contemporary and correct. The fact that some of the painters, whose names are given, are much less famous than others, and that some of the paintings bear no name, is in their favour. Moreover, the miniatures are all on the same high level of achievement, and the one signed by Mirak is not superior to the others: what is perhaps the finest of all, the "Ascent of the Prophet" (Plate XIV), is not assigned to any painter.

The five painters are: Mirak; Sultan Muhammad; Mir Sayyid Ali; Mirza Ali; and Muzaffar Ali.

According to Schulz,[4] the miniatures have been cut down in places, and therefore were not originally designed for the book. But I think this is a misconception. It is true that in places the designs overflow their borders, as for instance in Plates IV and VIII. But this is a common practice and does not mean that the miniatures were originally on a larger scale and were cut down to fit the book. They were, however, inserted in places left vacant for them, and not painted on the page itself. There are indeed cases where the miniatures are much later than the MS. The small Nizami in the British Museum (Add. 25900) is dated 1442, but the paintings by Bihzad inserted in it are considerably later in date. The date of a manuscript cannot, therefore, always be accepted as the date of the miniatures in it. In the present case, however, the style and the costumes leave no doubt that the paintings are contemporary with the writing.

All the artists conform to a single ideal of style; so much so, that if the entire series of paintings had been ascribed to one master, one would not have been surprised. There is far less difference of style between these miniatures than often exists between the works of a single artist.

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[4] W. Schulz: "Die Persich-Islamische Miniaturmalerei" (Liepzig, 1914), p. 126.

The most famous of these five artists is Mirak. He ranks indeed, among Persian masters, second only to Bihzad, whose pupil he is said to have been. According to Martin, he came from Ispahan and " must have begun to work at the end of the fifteenth century at Herat, as most of the buildings there are said to be adorned with inscriptions by his hand." He was famous also as an ivory carver. Martin quotes a statement that he died during the time of Muhammad Khan, who died in 1510, but rejects this as an error, because of the painting in our Nizami manuscript of 1539-1543. Miniatures ascribed to Mirak and to Bihzad are found in another splendid Nizami in the British Museum (Or. 6810), dated 1494.

The paintings in our manuscript must have been made at the end of Mirak's career. He represents the older generation. But in the five miniatures bearing his name he seems to have accommodated himself with some facility to the style in vogue at Tahmasp's court, though in one of them (Plate VIII) there may be traces of an older manner. To judge by earlier paintings ascribed to him, such as those in the Nizami of 1494, his design is rather static; he does not deal in movement; but in attitude and gesture his figures have a certain massive stateliness.

Sultan Muhammad, whose name is on two of the miniatures, also ranks among the greatest of the Persian painters. He was chief illuminator to the Shah and perhaps it was he who superintended the execution of the Nizami manuscript. Martin describes him as a man of universal curiosity; a designer of carpets, a bookbinder, the inventor of an ingenious clock and an experimenter in porcelain manufacture. He went to Turkey and was given a studio and a pension by Sulaiman (Solyman the Great); and died about 1555.

Sultan Muhammad is fond of outdoor scenes and paints picnics, pleasure-parties and hunting expeditions with evident delight. He was a close observer of natural action in men and animals; his figures are graceful, his horses of marvellous elegance; and he excels in movement. I should be inclined to attribute to him the splendid " Ascension of the Prophet " (Plate XIV). There are beautiful uncoloured drawings by him; and Martin is inclined to think that the magnificent " Man with a Camel " in Messrs. Ricketts and Shannon's collection is by his hand.

Mir Sayyid Ali was the son of a painter who brought him, as a youth, to study in Tabriz under Bihzad. He afterwards acquired reputation as a poet as well as a painter. I have already told how he was commissioned by the emperor Humayun to illustrate the Romance of Hamzah. His one painting in our manuscript is one of the very finest designs in the book.

Mirza Ali was a painter of Tabriz, especially famous as a designer of arabesque ornaments to books, but his two miniatures in this book show him to have been a most accomplished figure-designer and colourist.

Muzaffar Ali is said to have died young before he had acquired fame.

For further details of these painters, of whose biography, however, but little is known, the reader should consult Sir Thomas Arnold's new work " Painting in Islam," where the original documents are given for the first time in English.

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PAINTING IN PERSIA

FROM the third to the seventh century Persia was ruled by the kings of the Sasanian dynasty, of whom the kings known to the West as Sapor I and Chosroes I are well known to us through Roman history and their conflicts with the Roman empire. A story told of Chosroes (Nushirwan) is illustrated in our manuscript. The second Chosroes is the hero of the Poem of Khosru and Shirin, one of the Five Poems; and another of the poems is concerned with the life and exploits of another Sasanian monarch, Bahram Gur.

Had the pictorial art of the Sasanian era survived, we should be better able to judge how much of its traditions persisted in Persian painting of the later periods. To judge from sculptured reliefs and the figure-designs in embossed silver (of which there are fine specimens in the British Museum, though the great collection is in Leningrad), Sasanian art seems to have retained something of the character of the art of ancient Assyria; but we know it best through its decorative design; and for decoration and colour the race of Iran has always shown a remarkable genius.

It was near the beginning of the Sasanian period, in the third century A.D., that Mani, a Persian, founded the religion called Manichaeism. It was apparently an attempt to make a new world-religion by fusing together elements from Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Mani, according to tradition, was himself a famous painter and his religion encouraged the art. Manichaean paintings of about the eighth century have been discovered at Turfan in Chinese Turkestan by Professor Von Le Coq, and are now at Berlin. Among these are fragments of manuscript-illuminations which strikingly anticipate the Persian miniatures of many centuries later. Sir Thomas Arnold has suggested that this Manichaean tradition counted far more in the development of Persian painting than has been realised; and this Manichaean tradition must have preserved the formulas of Sasanian art.

But in the seventh century Persia was stormed over and subjugated by the Arabs, in that rapid and vast tide of conquest which swept over half the ancient world, impelled by the militant religion of Muhammad; one of the most astonishing events in history. Henceforward Persia is part of Islam. The art of this period centres in Baghdad. The Arabs had no art of their own; but being intelligent people were very willing to patronise the artists of the countries they overran and possessed. The Muslim theologians followed the Jewish prohibition of images, and discouraged the representation of human beings in painting. But where there is an instinct and a gift for art, no external power will suppress it: and the prohibition was not taken seriously by Muhammadans when they had the inborn taste and ability.

Baghdad under the Caliphs was a great capital, a centre of fine culture, literature and learning; and artists gathered there not only from Mesopotamia, but from Syria and Egypt. Little has survived of the art of this era, but a famous manuscript of a work by the Arabian author, Hariri, in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, is richly illustrated and gives a most lively picture of the life of the time. This art drew some of its elements from late classic traditions.

In 1258 Persia was again conquered, and Baghdad taken, sacked and laid waste by the invading Mongols from the East. Already masters of China, the Mongols brought with them Chinese artists. Even at the time of the first Muhammadan conquests, China was, for the Arabs, the first country in the world for art, and Chinese traders brought their wares to the Nearer East by sea as well as by land. But now a direct impress from China was made on Persian art. A precious manuscript "History of the World," now divided between the libraries of the Royal Asiatic Society and of Edinburgh University, dated 1314, is full of illustrations in a mixed Persian and Chinese manner, remarkable for the silvery and subdued tone of the colouring.

The Mongol influence receded soon, and native tradition began to reassert itself. In the fourteenth century Persia was once again conquered by Timur; and under the Timurid dynasty of his successors, Persian painting gradually reached its full development and acquired its final character. All the various elements that had gone to its formation combined into a definitely Persian style. Emulation with the art of China affected the Persian painters to some extent, especially in the northern and eastern provinces, and in Samarcand a school arose which preferred an art of line, with few and discreet touches of colour and gold. But exquisite as is the line-drawing in the Persian miniatures of the mature period, as we see from certain paintings that have been left unfinished, these are specially distinguished by a sumptuous refinement of colour, hardly equalled elsewhere.

In the miniatures of a manuscript in the British Museum, dated 1396, and executed at Baghdad (Add. 18113), we find the conventions already fixed which were to prevail in the art of Bihzad and his school, though in a somewhat stiff and primitive form.

Bihzad was born towards the middle of the fifteenth century. In his work all the elements from which Persian painting is derived are perfectly assimilated. He is the most famous of Persian masters, and so great is his prestige that his signature has been attached to numberless paintings without any other reason than that they were admired by their owners. He himself signed his work so unobtrusively and in letters so microscopic that his genuine signature has sometimes remained for centuries undetected. There are not many works which can with certainty be assigned to his hand. But he created a brilliant school; and though the precise authorship of these numerous paintings is often a matter of doubt (and the real study of this art is still only in its initial stage and presents many problems), the best of them reach a very high level and we need not vex ourselves with questions of attribution in order to enjoy them.

Late in Bihzad's life the Timurid dynasty was succeeded by that of the Safavid. There is no real change in style; but Bihzad's manner is elaborated and enriched by a group of masters, whose work could not be better represented than in the miniatures of our manuscript.

What, then, is the character of this mature phase of Persian painting? We are impressed, first of all, by its supremely decorative quality. The figures, the dresses, the birds, the trees, the flowers, the buildings, are all real things, such as the artist saw in his own daily life; there is exquisite observation in every detail; but all is removed into a strange and radiant world, because there is no attempt to render the light and shade of nature; everything glows distinct like a jewel. For the every-day vision of the ordinary man is substituted a vision in which the world is a glorious world, washed clean in a magical light and dazzling in its colour.

In no other art do we feel a more sensuous appreciation by the artist of his materials; of the smoothly-burnished paper, of the pure and precious pigments. It is, indeed, the danger of this art that, as we see in its decay, it is prone to decline into craftsmanship, uninformed from within by the stress of mental effort.

It is a romantic art. " The people of the East," says E. G. Browne, " have much of the child's love of the marvellous ; they like their kings to be immensely great and powerful, their queens and princesses incomparably beautiful." And this romantic temperament is reflected in an art which loves to place the personages it depicts in the enhancement of wonderful settings, where all the accessories are fastidiously choice, where the complex profusion of Nature is sifted and simplified, the flowers, perfect in shape and hue, presented single and detached, that the eye may find in each a separate enjoyment. However impassioned the central motive of the scene, the painter abates no jot of delighted interest in every particular element that composes it. He does not sacrifice and suppress in order to concentrate on what is most significant. The intellect is not exercised on formal problems, on research for severity, mass, amplitude. A traditional formula is accepted, and the artist's aim is to combine the given elements into a glowing and felicitous whole, with a luxurious heightening and adornment of the scene within the framing space. Everything is to be as precious to the eye as it can be made.

European painting, and much of the painting of India and the Far East, has its origin in religious art, which, even when the religious motive has died out, leaves traces behind it, whether as a kind of perfume in the atmosphere, or in the foundations of the composition and the grouping of forms. Persian painting does not avoid religious themes ; subjects from the Old Testament and the New, though in a Muslim version which makes them often unfamiliar at first sight, are treated again and again ; but these paintings are illustrations of sacred story, they are not religious conceptions finding emotional expression through form and colour and translating the spectator into an ideal atmosphere by the mere act of contemplation. The mysticism in which Persian poetry is steeped could find no pictorial counterpart. And the courts for which the artists worked demanded chiefly the illustration of heroic legends, epic and romance. This art is concerned with men and women, with passion and adventure, battle and the chase and scenes of love ; all set in what, to us at least, is a fairy world of unearthly vividness and beauty.

Where a landscape background is demanded, we note the universal convention of the high horizon, common to all Asiatic landscape art ; a happy device, by which figures can be seen distinct in the various planes without interfering with each other. What is peculiar to Persian art is the invention by which figures in the distance, not dimmed or diminished so as to lose personal interest, appear half-seen, or with heads and shoulders only emerging, behind the ridges of delicately-tinted rocks that rise against blue or gold sky. For sometimes the sky will be of burning gold—and what French impressionist, with all his ardour of naturalism, has given so truly the sensation of cloudless splendour ? or a ground of gold will transfer that sensation to the dazzling glare of the desert, roofed with a sky of pure lapis lazuli blue, into which may drift, it may be, little curling wisps of white cloud.

A marvellous landscape art, of unheard-of colour and fantastic beauty, might have been, one thinks, evolved out of these elements. But there is no such development. The Persian painters never made an art of pure landscape. The curiosity, the research into natural appearances, the notation of atmosphere, which, alike in China and Europe, were to combine with the craving to express emotion through a contemplated scene, and gradually impel painters to embody their ideas in a landscape, were not in the Persian temperament.

This pictorial art remains, then, severely limited; it has little growth or expansion. All its effort is spent in the perfecting of the painter's means of expression within the accepted formula of tradition. But so perfect is it in its kind, that we cannot wish it otherwise.

In the paintings of this Nizami we have the impression of an art that is fully ripe, on the edge, even, of being over-ripe. There is almost an excess of beauty: and in some moods we may turn from these gorgeous pages with a craving for the ruder energy, the barer manner of more primitive periods. Elegance, fastidious refinement and sumptuousness are the ideals of the time. The workmanship could not be more masterly, nor the colour of more dazzling richness; vigour is not wanting. But the art could go no further on these lines: and the languor and affectation which were to follow before very long were, perhaps, inevitable, unless someone had been found with the energy and independence to lead a powerful reaction. We must remember that in Persia and in India painters were dependent on courts for a living, and they would pass from one court to another, wherever a patron promised encouragement. The taste of the court was imposed on the painters attached to it. Hence, the striking uniformity of style among the artists who illustrated our manuscript; and hence an aggravation of the difficulty caused by the scarcity of securely documented works, in identifying the paintings of particular masters. The elegance and luxury of Shah Tahmasp's court are reflected in the paintings of our manuscript. Whatever defects we may find in them, they are supreme in their own style, and have the fascination of all works of art which embody a certain intention carried to its utmost pitch of achievement.

THE LIFE OF NIZAMI

I MUST now give some account of the poet whose five chief poems are here illustrated. Happily, there is an excellent monograph on Nizami by Dr. Bacher, published at Leipzig in 1871. This was translated into English by Samuel Robinson and published in 1873. Mr. Robinson re-translated from the Persian Dr. Bacher's versions of extracts from the poems, using a more literal style. The following brief account of the poet's life is based on Bacher's work.

Nizami is accounted one of the greatest of the Persian poets, and in the particular vein of the Romantic Epic, supreme among them. Oriental biographers have given various dates for his birth; but Dr. Bacher has proved from internal evidence in his writings that Nizami was born in 1140-41 A.D. He was a native of Ganja, now Elizavetpol, in the province of Arran, a city founded by Alexander. Its climate is pleasant; it has many gardens, vineyards and orchards, and was once a populous town. He was early left an orphan, but the memory of his father and mother remained vivid with him in his manhood and he never ceased to lament his untimely loss. Partly perhaps because of this early sorrow, he was from youth inclined to solitude and averse from common pleasures. Ganja was a city lying near the frontiers of Islam and its people had the habits of a border-people trained to arms in case of a conflict with the unbelievers and often excited by alarms and excursions. But it was famed for its men of learning as well as for its fierce devotion to the faith. Nizami was of a gentle nature, and outgrew the fanatic intolerance of his fellow-citizens; but his temperament was deeply religious and he was an ardent student.

The young poet consorted with Puritanical friends, who frowned on all enjoyment of the world. By degrees he felt a numbness growing upon him in this atmosphere. His associates seemed to him dried-up in their asceticism, the "self-enjoyings of self-denying." And at last he revolted from a life which was choking the happy expansion of his spirit and all its natural impulses. He determined to break from his prison-house and choose his own path in life. In a poem he tells how the Spirit of Solitude came to him on a still night and told him what he must do:

> Why cast water on this pure flame? . . . . . .
> Under the dome of this fair blue canopy
> Sing the story of thine own heart like a sweet melody.
> Keep far away from those highwaymen, the passions.
> Thine heart knoweth the way—consult thine own heart.

The whole passage is translated by Robinson, from whom I take these lines. They remind us of Astrophel and Stella, and Philip Sidney's

> Fool, said my Muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

Nizami, freed from the oppression of Puritanism, declared his own faith:

> The heart to which the Supreme Lord hath preached
> Becometh a union of body and soul.

From this illumination of the spirit came a flowering of his poetic gift. He wrote now the "Treasury of Mysteries" (Makhzan al Asrar), the earliest of the Five Poems. Though it is not a narrative, its meditations are embroidered by short apologues in narrative form.

The "Treasury of Mysteries" was dedicated to the Atabeg (Regent) Ildighiz, and according to Bacher was published at the time of that prince's campaign against the King of Georgia in 1165-1166. The poet was then twenty-five years old. It was the custom of the poets of the time, who appear to have been remarkably numerous, not merely to dedicate their works to some ruler, great or small, in flattering verses, but to make their chosen patron's unequalled merits and unique achievements their principal theme of song. Their Muse made up by importunity what it lacked in inspiration. Nizami, looking round on these courts and strongholds, each besieged by a swarm of adulatory songsters bent on favour and fortune, drew himself up in disdain. He submitted to custom so far as to dedicate his poems to a possible patron, and hoped for some wage in return: but to frequent the courts of princes and intrigue against rivals for rewards was more than his spirit could bring itself to do.

It appears that Ildighiz was too absorbed in martial enterprises to pay attention to the poem laid at his feet. And Nizami, instead of rushing to a rival prince or princeling, resigned himself to the solitude of independence. Living frugally, he solaced himself with the sweets of quiet and meditated at leisure. Much of the lyric poetry composed at this time seems to have been lost: but Nizami was preparing himself for a great effort on a large scale. His famous predecessor in the tenth century, Firdausi, had turned to the national traditions of Persia, historical and legendary, for the theme of his colossal poem, the "Shah Namah or Book of the Kings," over which he spent thirty years of his life. And now, seeking a subject adequate to his ambitions, Nizami turned to the same store-house of material. The story he chose was the story of the love of Khosru Parviz (Chosroes II), one of the Sasanian kings, for Shirin, the beautiful Armenian princess. True, these were not of the faithful:[5] and one of Nizami's early friends did not hesitate to reproach him bitterly for writing about infidels, though when the poet began to read what he had written, this severe mentor, transported by the charm of the verse, surrendered and recanted.

This poem made Nizami famous. The first masterpiece in its own kind, that of the Romantic Epic, it has retained its supremacy unchallenged. The poet received presents as well as praise, but from the three princes to whom the work was dedicated he received nothing at all. Some years after, however, one of them, Kizil Arslan, wrote him a letter in his own hand and invited him to his court. Nizami went and received a most gratifying welcome. Kizil Arslan not only praised the poem as a master-work, but bestowed upon its author two villages as a reward, with other personal gifts. Nizami soon tired of the court and withdrew to his rural seclusion. The other poets of the day regarded him with jealousy and dislike, which they did not forbear to express; this was not on account of the two villages, for these were considered a paltry remuneration, but because of what seemed an insufferable pride that would not stoop to their own fawning ways.

"Khosru and Shirin" was written in the year 1175-1176. Nizami, happy in his retreat, wrote much lyric verse, now lost, during the next decade; and then came an invitation from the King of Shirvan to write another romance on the story of Laila and Majnun. This is the most famous love-story of the Near East, and is surely one of the great love-stories of the world. But at first Nizami shrank from the theme. This was no Persian tale of princes and princesses, set against a varied and beautiful background with romantic associations, in country familiar to himself. It was the Arab story of two children of the desert; an unhappy passion, in a world of rock and sand! It promised no openings for the luxurious adornments that Persian verse delights in: it seemed monotonous and without relief. Nizami was overcome, it is said, by the persuasions of his own young son to attempt this daunting theme; but, once embarked on it, he was seized by the story and carried his poem through to its end in a surprisingly short space of time.

The story of Khosru and Shirin is, no doubt, full of beautiful episodes, but

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[5] Shirin was a Christian.

Khosru is not wholly sympathetic as a hero, he seems scarcely worthy of the noble-natured Shirin. With its rich colour, its vein of extravagance and ready indulgence in the marvellous, it is essentially a romantic story. "Laila and Majnun" is on a different plane: we pass from romance to tragedy. It is interspersed with episodes, but none of these leads us away from the central theme; the throbbing note of passion is muted from time to time, but it returns, it beats with ever-deeper and more haunting tone, it dominates from the opening scene of the child-lovers' mutual rapture to the last meeting in the desert and the last cry of Majnun upon Laila's grave. I speak, of course, of the stories as stories: how the two poems compare as poetry I do not know.

Sir William Jones, the great Orientalist of the eighteenth century, published a poem on Laila and Majnun, by a later and much less celebrated poet, Hatifi, who died in 1520. Hatifi, he says, "has not even approached the splendour and sublimity of his master's diction," but, he thinks, has excelled Nizami in tenderness and simplicity.[6]

"Laila and Majnun" was composed in the year 1188-1189. Three years afterwards Nizami wrote his Iskandar-namah, the "Book of Alexander the Great." More and more he turned his back on the world and cherished his chosen solitude.

> I am like a dead body with the soul of a man
> But not journeying with the caravan, or one of its
> company—

So he describes himself. It appears that he had been married three times, but one after the other his wives had died. He had no intimate friend. Poetry alone was the consolation of his griefs. He read much and meditated more. Firdausi's "Book of the Kings" was his favourite study and at one time he planned to write a poem on the stories which Firdausi had omitted. But this project was rejected for a more ambitious enterprise; and the history of Alexander was the theme now chosen. "The Book of Alexander" is in two parts; the first part is concerned with the hero as conqueror of the world, the second with Alexander as Philosopher and Prophet. This long poem was revised after its first completion in 1191.

In 1198, when he was fifty-eight, Nizami wrote his last long poem, the Seven Portraits (Heft Paikar). This is not a single narrative, but a combination of stories, set in the frame-work of the history of Bahram Gur.

In the year 1202-1203, the sixty-fourth year of his age, Nizami died. His name had long been illustrious. He had paid one of the penalties of fame, in being attacked by envious versifiers, who not only calumniated his character, but stole from his writings. But, though on occasion he scornfully vindicated himself, he kept aloof from the quarrelsome tribe. He had dedicated his life to poetry in the severe and serious spirit of a Milton. "If his genius," says Browne, "has few rivals amongst the poets of Persia, his character has even fewer."

Whatever other poems Nizami may have written—and he is said by one author to have written nearly twenty thousand verses of lyric—very little has been handed down besides the five long poems collected after his death as the Khamsa or Quintet.

It remains to give some more detailed account of these poems, at least in so far as they are illustrated in our manuscript. Having no Persian myself, I can venture no estimate of Nizami's gifts as a poet: but we are here concerned with the matter of the poems, for an acquaintance with the stories is necessary to the understanding of the paintings as illustrations. And in the summaries given below I am indebted to the labours of others, and especially to E. J. W. Gibb's "History of Ottoman Poetry" and to E. G. Browne's "Literary History of Persia."[7]

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[6] Works of Sir William Jones, 1807, Vol. XIII, p. 390.

[7] See E. G. Browne: A Literary History of Persia from Firdawsi to Sa'adi, pp. 297-298, 303-304.

LUCKNOW.

THE FIVE POEMS

THE TREASURY OF MYSTERIES

THE "Treasury of Mysteries" is the shortest of the Five Poems. It was written, as we have seen, before the others, and is not a romantic narrative, but a mystical poem illustrated by apologues. E. G. Browne ("Literary History of Persia," Vol. II, p.403) thinks it inferior in quality to the other poems. He says: "It comprises, besides a good deal of introductory matter and several doxologies, twenty maqalas or Discourses, each of which deals with some theological or ethical topic, which is first discussed in the abstract and then illustrated by an apologue." The splendid painting by Mirak reproduced on Plate III illustrates one of these apologues, of which a verse-translation will be found in Browne's "History." Nushirwan, that King of the Sasanian dynasty who is better known to us as Chosroes I, was a great conqueror, but like other conquerors, forgot in his schemes of glory the price his subjects paid for his victorious wars. One day when out hunting, the king in the ardour of the chase became separated from his followers. His Vizier alone accompanied him. Riding across the plain, the two came upon a village in ruins. It was deserted except for two owls who were noisily hooting on the top of a crumbling house-wall. Their screeches in that solitary place smote Nushirwan with superstitious fear. "What secrets are they telling each other?" asked the King of the Vizier. "Pardon me, O King," replied the Vizier, "if I repeat what they are saying. One of those birds is giving his daughter as a mate to the other, and demands from him a suitable marriage-portion. 'Give her,' he says, 'this ruined village and one or two others thrown in.' 'By all means,' replies the other. 'If our worthy sovereign does but continue in his present courses, and leaves his people to perish in misery and neglect, I will gladly give, not two nor three, but a hundred thousand ruined homes.'" The courageous rebuke became famous.

This is a favourite subject with the Persian painters: but no artist, so far as I know, has made of it so enchanting a picture as that by Mirak, here reproduced. The atmosphere is romantic in the extreme. Of especial beauty are details, such as the two deer grazing in the courtyard of the ruined house, the storks in their nest high up against a gold sky dappled with blue and white, the flowers which fringe the margin of the stream. The silver used for painting the water has gone black. Mirak's signature is on the wall of the ruined palace.

The subject of Plate IV is also frequently painted. The incident is that of an old woman complaining to Sultan Sanjar that she has been robbed by a soldier. Sanjar was a brilliant ruler who, after reigning over Khorasan for twenty-four years, was proclaimed King of the whole Seljuq Empire at Baghdad in 1119. He made many conquests, but disasters overcame the later years of his long reign and he died, broken-hearted at the ruin of his country, in 1156. Nizami was born during his reign.

In this painting the old woman administers a homely rebuke to the King. When she complained to him that one of his soldiers had robbed her, "How can you tease me with your trivial grievances?" he replied, "Can't you see that I am setting out on a great expedition abroad, to conquer and punish whole nations?" "What is the use," she retorts, "of going out to conquer foreign nations, when you can't keep your own soldiers in order?" The miniature is of an extraordinary richness. Again we have little white "Chinese" clouds in the blue sky, crossed by the gold beams of the sun. The glare of the desert sand is symbolised by gold which foils the coloured dresses and the gem-like flowers.

The third of the stories from the "Treasury of Mysteries," here illustrated, is the subject of the painting reproduced on Plate V. The story is recounted in Browne's lectures on Arabian Medicine, pages 89-90. It is the tale of a strange duel between two rival physicians. Aeschylus and Euripides, in the famous scene in "The Frogs" of Aristophanes, contended with the weapons of their profession, words and phrases: but physicians are more dangerous folk than poets, and these two rivals were to fight with cunningly compounded poisons. One gave the other a pill made of such devastating ingredients that he would have been rent asunder by his convulsions, had he not instantly swallowed an antidote which rendered it harmless as a lump of sugar. Then he, in his turn, prepared his stroke. He went apart, plucked a rose, breathed a spell upon it and offered it to his opponent to smell. The other, who had watched him with apprehension, no sooner smelt the rose than he fell down and expired, as we see him in the picture. And we are expressly told that the fatal issue of this fantastic duel was caused by no power of incantation, but merely by fear—the force of suggestion on the mind.

In the foreground are two tanks of water let into the pavement and connected by a conduit. As usual, there is no attempt at drawing these in perspective: it is as if they were on a ground-plan. The silver has blackened less than usual. The last two illustrations to the "Treasury of Mysteries" have no artist's name attached to them.

KHOSRU AND SHIRIN

The story of Khosru (Khusrau) and Shirin is given in Gibb's "History of Ottoman Poetry," as an analysis of the Turkish poem by Sheykhi, who followed Nizami closely, except in certain particulars, though he omitted the conclusion of the tale, which is related by Gibb, after Nizami. See Gibb's "History," Vol. I, pages 314-325, for a more detailed account of the whole story.

Khosru was the son of Hurmuz, King of Persia. So great was his promise, that his father was filled with joy and gratitude to Heaven. The King determined that for such a son the realm which he was to inherit could not be too justly governed. He proclaimed that whoever did a wrong to his neighbour should be severely punished. The Prince was fond of hunting and on one of his expeditions invaded the house of a villager and made merry there all night with a minstrel and other companions; one of his slaves stole grapes from a garden; his horse broke loose and trampled a poor man's corn. Complaint was made to the King, whose wrath was great on finding that the offender against this edict was his beloved son. The prince's horse was given to the poor man whose corn he had spoilt; the slave to the owner of the garden; and the prince's own accoutrements to the villager. Khosru confessed his offence, and was pardoned further punishment. Soon after, he dreamed that the great king, his grandfather, appeared to him and said that since he had willingly given up his minstrel, his horse, his slave and his accoutrements, he was destined to win a minstrel far sweeter, a horse far swifter, and a mistress of peerless beauty whose name should be Shirin.

This dream sunk into the young prince's mind. He had a friend, whose name was Shapur, who was often with him. Shapur was an accomplished painter, whose pleasure it was to wander at will far and wide in strange countries. And recounting his travels to the prince, he chanced to describe the country of Armenia and told him how it was ruled over by a queen, and this queen had for heiress a niece, of a beauty beyond words to describe; her name was Shirin. Shirin! thought Khosru, and remembered his dream. Already, with the mere story of her loveliness, and the repetition of her name, he was in love. He asked his friend for more and more; all that he heard enchanted him: and now nothing would serve but that Shapur should start immediately for Armenia and arrange the betrothal.

Shapur sets out, provided with portraits of Khosru which he has painted with his own hand. Arrived in Armenia, he seeks his opportunity, and soon finds it. Shirin and her maidens are coming into a meadow. He hangs a portrait of his friend on a tree, but refrains from showing himself. The princess, espying the portrait, goes up to it; she takes it in her hand, marvels at the beauty it portrays, and is straightway as deep in love with Khosru from his picture as he with her from her description. But her ladies, seeing her so absorbed, her eyes filled with tears and her lips pressed again and again to this likeness of an unknown man, were offended, and fearful also, because of the strangeness of the occurrence. They told her it was some demon's doing, got hold of the picture and tore it up. And they persuaded her to leave the unholy place. But no sooner were they in another meadow than a second portrait was discovered, for Shapur had heard all and was there before them. The same thing happened. They moved on again and a third portrait was hanging on a tree once more. By now Shirin had grown cunning in her love; she found a pretext to send her maids away, keeping the portrait herself; and seizing the moment, Shapur appeared before her. He tells Shirin his errand; how Khosru, whose likeness she has in her hands, loves her and has sent her a ring which he gives her. Shirin, on her side, avows her own love for Khosru. How is she to reach the Persian capital? That is all her thought. Shapur directs her and retires.

The princess, possessed with love, could endure no delay. That very night she tells her aunt, the Queen, that she intends to go hunting on the morrow and may she borrow Shabdiz, the night-black horse, swifter than any in Armenia? Her aunt consents. Next morning, Shirin, armed like a warrior, sets out with her maids, and they hunt the deer. Mounted on a horse that none can keep with, she easily eludes her companions and is soon lost to their sight.

For seven days Shirin rode on. On the seventh day, tired out with heat and travel, she found herself in a green valley and in the midst of it was a pool of water, delighting her eyes. She dismounted, and tied her black horse to a tree, hung up her arms, and stripped herself. Then, binding a blue cloth round her waist, she went down to the water and bathed. While she was bathing, there came to the place a young man, riding by himself. He saw the black horse tied to the tree, the hanging garments and arms, and then the girl in her bare beauty. He gazed at her in a kind of trance, she not seeing him. At last she turned round and was filled with confusion. He at once in modesty withdrew: in an instant Shirin was out of the pool and in her clothes, and away upon the back of Shabdiz.

Such was the first meeting of these fated lovers. For the young man was none other than Khosru, who, having fallen under unjust suspicion, had retired from his father's court in a voluntary exile, and was even now on his way to Armenia.

Shirin pursued her way, not without trouble in her mind, for something told her that he whom she had seen might prove to be the unknown prince, her lover. At last the Persian capital (Ctesiphon) was reached. The prince was already far away: but Shirin, presenting Khosru's ring, was received with all honour in the palace. Khosru, having learnt from Shapur of her possible arrival, had ordered that all her wishes were to be obeyed: and since, without him, the palace gave no pleasure, she would not remain; and a castle was built for her among the hills.

Just as Shirin was agitated at the sight of the young man, when she was bathing, because she dimly divined him to be her lover, so had Khosru ridden away from that encounter, agitated with surmise that it was Shirin that he had seen. In due time he arrived in Armenia, and was hospitably entertained by the Queen. Then came Shapur, who told him of all that had happened: and forthwith Shapur was despatched into Persia to fetch the princess back.

So, with Shapur, Shirin retraces her journey. But she arrives only to find Khosru departed. For in the interval certain of the Persians had rebelled against the King, because of the severity of his rule, and Bahram, a famous general, gave out that he would set Khosru on the throne in his stead. King Hurmuz was seized and his eyes put out: and messengers came to call Khosru to the capital. So he went, and was crowned king; but soon it became manifest that Bahram was plotting to be king himself; and Khosru was counselled to retire for a year and bide his time.

Now at last the lovers met, as Khosru was on his way to Armenia. They were filled with joy, and months passed in mutual entertainments, in hunting, and feasting and polo-playing and music. Each of the lovers had a minstrel. Barbad was the name of the singer who sang for Khosru; Nikisa, the girl who in a voice of equal sweetness sang for Shirin. Through the lips of these two the love they interpreted flowed and answered, one to the other.

So passed the time in forgetfulness of all but hunting and feasting and delight of companionship. At last came a night when Khosru, mastered by passion, sought to tempt Shirin: but she refused him, saying that he who was a king should rather be up and doing, to win back his kingdom. Stung by her words, and inspirited by her courage, Khosru departed the next morning on his great adventure. After long travel he came to the Roman Emperor, who gave him welcome and furnished him with troops, by whose means he was enabled to defeat the usurper Bahram and so came again into his own. Shirin meanwhile, disconsolate at the departure of her lover, though she herself had persuaded him to go, returned to Armenia; and her aunt dying soon after, became queen herself. What was her grief, however, when came the news that the Caesar who had restored her lover to his kingdom had proved so excessive in his friendship as to make Khosru marry his daughter Miriam?

Both were unhappy, each thinking ever of the other. And now Khosru learns that Shirin is again near him. For she, unable to endure the remoteness of Armenia, had come to Persia: and Shapur, who had never deserted her, brings the tidings to his friend that she is once more in her castle among the hills.

The disadvantage of this delightful castle was that there was no milk to be had in it, since the herds and their pasture were on the other side of the mountain. Now there was a young man called Farhad who was a friend of Shapur's, and who was noted for his rare skill and invention. Brought into Shirin's presence, he could neither speak nor hear the words she spoke to him, for he was instantly seized with a love that possessed his soul. At last her wishes were explained to him by others: and without ado he set himself to work. Before a month was over he had contrived to make a conduit through the mountain to the pastures. The herdsmen milked their goats into the conduit, and Shirin had fresh milk each morning.

The queen could not praise and honour Farhad enough : but he would have none of her gifts, it was her love only that he craved. Khosru heard of all this and was stung with jealousy. He had Farhad fetched from the stony hills where he wandered in the fever of his love and brought before him. Neither promise nor threat moved him a jot : and at last the King said that he should have Shirin if he would cut a road through the great mountain, Bisitun.

Farhad eagerly assented ; and forthwith, sustained by the immense faith of a lover, attacked his superhuman task. He worked with fierce energy, carving first from the rock an image of his Beloved, that she might look upon him as he toiled, and that he might pour his heart out to her image. And as he hewed the mountain, Shirin herself appeared before him. He fainted at sight of her : she had pity on him ; and now he told her of his despairing passion. This came to the ears of Khosru, who, full of wrath and apprehension at learning that Farhad was nearing the accomplishment of his stupendous enterprise, took counsel with his viziers what to do. They advised him out of their cunning and cruelty : and an old woman was sent to the young man to tell him that Shirin was dead. When he heard that, Farhad, like one lost, threw himself down from a high rock and was killed on the instant.

Then Shirin mourned for Farhad, having compassion on his great love, and built a dome over his grave, to be a shrine for true lovers ever after. Her thoughts were bitter towards Khosru because of his marriage with Miriam and his cruelty to Farhad. Nor, when Miriam died, would she listen to his messages. But love endures through many wounds. After scorn and repentance, after anger and sorrow, partings and meetings and tears and reproaches, it came to pass that these two, who in the beginning had given their hearts to one another, could not but come together in the end.

So at last were Khosru and Shirin happy. But as the years passed, a trouble began to cloud the King's mind. He had a son by his Greek wife, named Shiruya. And as the boy grew to manhood, he conceived a passion for the beautiful Shirin and secretly plotted to kill his father and so win both throne and queen. On a certain night he sent his hireling to do the murder : and he, creeping up to the bed, struck his knife into the breast of the sleeping king. Khosru awoke bleeding and knew that death was on him. His torment craved for a drink of water ; yet he would not wake the wearied-out Shirin ; and so he died in his pain without a cry. Shirin awoke. She saw her husband dead and her heart broke within her. Yet she forced herself to calm, and washed the body and anointed it with her own hands ; and scarce had done, when came a secret message from Shiruya, declaring his passionate love. Shirin knew what she must do. Feigning to be persuaded, she besought him to destroy Khosru's house and all his private possessions ; for she would not have these and their memories pass into that other's blood-stained hands. She prepared a bier ; and the body of the king was borne on it to a splendid tomb, and Shirin walked in the procession, richly clothed and as if happy at what had befallen her. So Shiruya exulted, for he thought she would be his. When they came to the tomb, the bier was borne in and Shirin stayed to watch by her lord's body and the door was closed. Then she uncovered Khosru's breast and kissed the wound. She took a dagger and plunged it into her own bosom ; then, falling on the bier, she clasped her dead love in her arms, laying her cheek to his : and those without heard the sob of her cry as she expired.

This famous story lends itself most readily to illustration, and Persian artists have painted the chief episodes in it again and again. In our manuscript there are six illustrations to the poem. The choice shows a preference for the scenic and ceremonial over the dramatic. The Farhad episode, and the murder of Khosru, are often illustrated in Persian art, but are here passed over. No doubt the taste of Tahmasp's luxurious court is reflected in the choice.

Plate VI.—Shapur brings the portrait of Khosru to Shirin. This has the name of Mirza Ali written beneath the painting. A fine painting attributed to Mirak, in the Nizami of 1494, already mentioned, shows Shirin seated on cushions in a meadow and looking at the portrait handed to her by one of her ladies. Here we see the final reception of the portrait from the hands of the painter himself.

Plate VII reproduces a painting by Sultan Muhammad which in its exquisite colouring has an almost intoxicating effect on one's senses. The fastidiously choice colours are relieved against each other so as to give the utmost delight to the eye by their harmonies and contrasts. Here it is the sky which is gold ; and against that gold sky the plane-tree, so adored of the Persian painters, shows its dark and pale leaves. The silver of the stream has blackened. Shirin, though bathing in the water, seems to be sitting on its surface.

Plate VIII.—The return of Shapur to Khosru. The name of Mirak is on the white tent-roof. It is finely written, but does not appear to be a signature. There are certain suggestions of an older style in this painting—the excessive size of the flowers and plants carpeting the ground and the slightly awkward way in which the approaching figures in the background are introduced, recall the fifteenth century. In this and the two following paintings we probably have an actual portrayal of Shah Tahmasp's own court.

Plate IX.—Khosru enthroned. This painting also bears the name of Mirak, who has here completely assimilated the style of Tahmasp's academy. The miniature seems at some time to have been damaged at the top, for a strip is missing and has been replaced by later work, not very successfully. The name of Shah Tahmasp is written on the pavilion-wall.

Plate X.—Khosru and Shirin listening to stories told by Shirin's maids. The name of Mirak is in the foreground. In spite of its brilliant colouring, this is intended for a night-scene, as is shown by the cresset in the background, behind the pavilion, and the lamps set in front of the throne. Perhaps the vivid whiteness of the blossom of the tree above the burning cresset as contrasted with the dullness of the similar tree on the right, may be intended to suggest the beauty of blossom illuminated against a dark sky : in no case, however, would it be a concession to naturalism. Wherever darkness is represented in an Asiatic painting, whether Persian, Indian, Chinese or Japanese, it is, I believe, invariably due to European influence. The Oriental painter assumes that the spectator is much more interested in seeing the figures represented than in his attempts to render natural effects. Among the girls at the left there is one whose European features contrast with those of her companions. Probably she is a Greek.

Plate XI.—Barbad playing to Khosru. By Mirza Ali. A gorgeous page, with all the luxurious accessories of which these painters were so fond. Again we note the fountain represented like a medallion, as if on a ground-plan.

LAILA AND MAJNUN.

This poem was translated in verse by James Atkinson, who was in the medical service of the East India Company and spent most of his life in Bengal. His translation was published in 1836 and is in the taste of the time, when Moore's and Byron's Oriental tales in verse were still the fashion. It was republished in 1905, with an introduction by L. Cranmer-Byng. A prose analysis of Hamdi's Turkish poem on the subject is given in Gibb's "Ottoman Poetry," Vol. II, pages 175-190.

The story begins in the school-room. An Arab of noble race has a son whom he calls Kais, a beautiful and sensitive boy, gentle and amiable in his disposition. In due time the boy is sent to school; and in the same school, among other boys and girls, is a girl called Laila, without conventional beauty, but of singular charm. Kais falls deeply in love with her and soon Laila returns his love. They lose all appetite for study, all ambition for learning: while their school-mates pore over their lessons, they can only sit entranced, gazing in each other's eyes. They try to conceal their state and in their simplicity imagine they have succeeded. Tongues are loosened; their mutual passion becomes the common theme of gossip, and Kais receives the nick-name, Majnun, the Possessed, the Madman, which is to cling to him all his life.

Laila was the daughter of the chief of another tribe than that to which Majnun belonged, and when her parents heard the gossip, her mother, deeply vexed that her daughter should bestow her love on one so mocked at, removed her from school and forbade the two to meet. Majnun, when his love came no more to the school, could not endure to remain himself; he sought her house and disguised himself in order to procure stolen meetings; but she was denied him. Her parents removed with her to a retreat among the mountains; but Laila's heart was with Majnun. He sought her out in her retreat; but no sooner had they met than he was driven away once more. The youth wandered restless and absorbed by his passion; he made songs about his Beloved, which he sang to the air. A fever consumed him, so that his friends hardly knew him. His father, Salim Amiri, unhappy at the state of his dear son, gave him such advice as good and prudent men will offer on such occasions: such excess of love was unreasonable, there were other Arab girls as fair: all the wisdom in short that love thinks foolishness and the experience it knows is nothing but inexperience. His father's words had no meaning for Majnun. Salim Amiri, baffled, had recourse to his women's counsel. They had but one answer to his perplexities. There was no remedy for this son, but the fulfilment of his desires: Laila must be sought in marriage. The solution offended Salim Amiri's pride, but he accepted it in his trouble, summoned his followers, and set out for the camp of Laila's father, who went out to meet him, somewhat doubtful of this martial embassy. With no beating about the bush, the old warrior spoke out: his own blood was the nobler, he abased himself by suing for Laila's hand, but his son's torment could be appeased none other way, therefore, let the girl forthwith be given to him in marriage, and a great price should be paid for her hand. The other, inwardly angered by so haughty a demand, disguised at first his resentment and spoke smoothly. Heaven, not man, disposed such unions; madness was not a sin, but who would give his daughter to one crazed? Let Majnun's reason be restored; then the matter might be considered; till then, he begged to be troubled no farther.

Salim Amiri, incensed at the rebuff, but disdaining further parley, rode off. Again he and his kindred sought to recall Majnun to a reasonable mind. They tried the art of necromancy, they soothed and caressed, they depicted the ravishing charms of a rival beauty: all in vain. Majnun, inconsolable, indignant, fled from them into the wilderness. Full of tears, he could do nothing but repeat the name of Laila to the stony rocks and the empty air, or make songs to his adored.

Exhausted by grief, he was traced to where he lay and carried home. A last remedy remained: the shrine of Mecca. In that holy place surely the power of Heaven would restore his senses. The caravan set out; Majnun, listless and indifferent, was carried in a litter; the camels moved swiftly across the desert till the minarets of Mecca rose in sight. There the father prayed his earnest prayer that his son might be delivered from the curse of love. Then, indeed, Majnun smiled in his father's face. Delivered? Who would wish to be delivered from heaven? And he raised his hands and thanked God for his great love, and prayed that it might be increased in him. And truly it seemed that his love was not of this earth but belonged to eternal things. So in silent grief the father carried his son home.

Now among the men of Laila's tribe it began to be told how a youth was to be seen in the desert, bare-headed, in strange attire, who sang songs so musical that all who heard them repeated them to one another; and in all these songs was the name of Laila. They told their story to the Shaykh, Laila's father; and he, roused to anger because he thought his tribe put to shame, prepared to punish this madman. Warned in time, Majnun's own tribesmen set out to find him. They explored the desert places, the rocks and thickets in vain. They only heard the cries of roving wild beasts and began to despair for his life. At last the outcast was found: unharmed by the fierce creatures of the desert around him, he lay stretched on the green margin of a stream, and with faint voice still murmured his songs of love and Laila.

Brought home once more, he knelt before his father and kissed his feet, and implored his forgiveness. The rose of his youth had withered and ashes were on his head; it was his fate; but what excuse could he utter that would be to his father's mind? Yet his father was his father still: and he prayed for his affection. Then his father took him in his arms and wept over him, and sought to comfort him with many words: he should wander no more, but enjoy the good world, which contained so much besides love; and he said much else with the like aim. But Majnun answered: "I did not seek love, but it came. Joy and pain are allotted by Heaven's decree. None can escape his fate. I am bound in fetters I would not break, if I could." So though all caressed and made much of him, Majnun in but few days could endure it no longer and fled again to his haunts in the desert.

Laila, meanwhile, not less true to her love, controlled it better. Having none in whom to confide, she kept her secret in her heart and counterfeited smiles and a cheerful air. Only at evening she went up on to the roof of her house, to be alone with her love and her unhappiness: and as she sat there she listened, and often from the lips of young and old who went by she heard the songs they sang to themselves, the songs that her own Majnun had made in her praise. Then her cheeks crimsoned, and her heart throbbed with joy. And soon a thought came to her mind; and she wrote out of her heart an answer to those songs, and went up on the roof, and espying her opportunity, let her poem float down

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to the hands of a passer-by. He caught it, and understood: and ere long it was in the hands of the poor outcast lover, who was transported with joy. So in the bliss of secret, invisible intercourse their love was renewed. And now in the sweet season of spring, Laila, with a lighter heart, went out with her maidens to seek the places where the flowers blossomed; and in a beautiful grove of palms she sat, full of sweet thoughts and sad thoughts, and solaced herself with the certainty of her own and her lover's truth to one another. A handsome and wealthy youth, Ibn Salam by name, chanced to ride by and was so smitten by her beauty that he sought her forthwith in marriage. Her parents were for consenting, but they urged her youth and bade him have patience: let him come at a later day and demand his bride.

In those days Majnun found a friend. Shaykh Nawfal, a chieftain famous for his valour, his generosity and kindliness, was hunting the deer one day when he came on the strange and solitary figure, youthful yet so worn and wasted with grief and fasting that he seemed more a phantom than a man. Dismounting, he greeted Majnun kindly and drew from him the story of his unhappiness. And the sympathy of this stranger's warm heart won by degrees the woeful lover to a more cheerful mind. Nawfal made him share his meal; and soon they were fast friends. Majnun returned to the pleasures of life, exchanged his rags for fine clothes, put a turban on his head, ate and drank with others, and a bloom came back to his cheeks. But the sweetness of friendship could not heal his heart's wound; and there came a day when Majnun cried out to his friend: "Nothing in the world can comfort me but love. Give me Laila or I shall die." At once Nawfal was on fire in his friend's cause. He would instantly ride with all his followers in arms and compel the stubborn father to yield up his daughter. No sooner resolved than done. An imperious demand was sent: it was scornfully refused. And Nawfal forthwith prepared for battle. Soon Majnun was witnessing in a perplexed horror the furious fighting of the tribes on their camels. He cried reproaches to either side; they laughed at his ravings and set on each other more furiously than before. Night interrupted a fight that Nawfal, for all his prowess, had nearly lost. The morning brought him reinforcements and in the renewed battle he was at last victorious. Laila's old father, broken in spirit, came to Nawfal: he would give up Laila to die by any death the victor chose; but one thing he refused at any cost; he would not give his child to a madman and a demon. Nawfal, seeing his victory was in vain, let the old man go and returned with the bitter news to Majnun.

The craving for solitude came again on Majnun. He broke away from Nawfal and rode away to the woods and wastes. There he chanced on a troop of antelopes caught in a snare. The hunter who had set the snare was making ready to cut the throat of one of them, when Majnun caught his arm and reproached him for his cruelty in killing a creature so lovely and so gentle. The hunter said: "Those words are good enough; but I am a poor man, with children to feed: how can I go without my game?" "Take my horse and free the deer," replied Majnun: which the hunter did, well pleased with his bargain. But the beautiful creatures, with eyes like Laila's, were no sooner liberated than they vanished; and Majnun was alone in the wilderness once more.

Laila's father, humiliated and enraged by his defeat, returned home. But Laila's beauty was undiminished; the fame of it had gone abroad, and suitors for her hand began to come from all sides. Among them was the young man who had fallen in love with her in the grove of palms, Ibn Salam. And to him was Laila given in betrothal. But sharp was the bridegroom's undeceiving: his bride replied to his endearments with a slap upon the cheek. She threatened herself or him with death if he persisted. The disconcerted husband, understanding that her love was given to another, forbore to press her, and resigned himself to the sad felicity of gazing on her beauty.

A stranger, riding in the hills, found Majnun sleeping under a tree. He awoke him and with the glee of malice told him the news of Laila's marriage: but who could expect a woman to be faithful? But when he perceived the ravage his words made, he repented and asked for forgiveness. He had lied: Laila, though given to another, was true to her only love. But what could console the desolate lover? Despair seemed all that remained.

Meanwhile, Majnun's old father mourned for his lost son and at last, reproaching himself for all that had happened, went out to seek him. It was no easy quest: but after wandering for a day and a night he met with a herdsman who directed him to where his son was living. It was a dark hollow, smelling of damp and strewn with bones. There lay Majnun, who started up with unrecognising eyes and trembling steps, and asked who was it that came to disturb him. Salim Amiri made himself known: by degrees Majnun returned to his senses and they embraced. Then the father said: "I am old and nearing the grave; come back to comfort my last hours, and let me know that I leave behind me one who will guard my home and the honour of our tribe." And Majnun was melted to tears, recalling his childhood and his mother's care: and for days and nights, full of remorse, he strove to thrust out from his heart the image of her who was now another's wife. But, Love, the tyrant, would not have it so and trampled down those thoughts and re-possessed his victim. Salim Amiri, seeing that he pleaded in vain, departed, and came to his home and before long had sunk into the grave. Some one came to tell Majnun; and Majnun beat his breast and tore his hair, and could not rest till he had journeyed to his father's grave. There in utter contrition he bewailed his sinful folly and now, too late, wished that he had listened to his father's wisdom. For long, inconsolable, he clung to that grave: then at last sought the desert once more. As he was without hope, so he was without fear; and the wild creatures of the desert, even the fiercest of them, knew him and forbore to harm him. Nay, they followed him about, like slaves that attend on a king: he slept pillowed on a lion's shoulder, with a leopard at his feet. Lynx and wolf and hyena, tamed as if by enchantment, played in company with the shy deer. One fawn was Majnun's fondling; its innocent grace, its full, dark eyes recalled Laila to his mind. He would kiss it between the eyes, and it never left him.

On an early morning there came a rider, who recognised him and who marvelled at his power over all those savage beasts. He brought news of Laila. He had seen her weeping and asked for whom she mourned. She confessed it was for Majnun; all her thoughts were with him. She longed to escape, but could not: and she had besought this stranger to find out Majnun and take him the letter she had written and kissed a hundred times before she sent it. Majnun trembling took the message and began to read the burning words in which Laila told of the unaltered fidelity of her heart, and implored his pity on her misery. Majnun longed to send his message in reply, but he had not pen nor paper. The stranger was providentially supplied with these; and the lover wrote, pouring out

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his adoration and despair; his only comfort that they might be blest in Heaven.

A second time Majnun was to find a friend and be succoured by him. This was a chieftain named Salim, whose kind heart prompted him to seek out the wanderer: and, once more the sympathy of friendship wrought on Majnun and lightened the dark cloud on his mind. He asked for friends of whom he had once been fond, he asked for his mother: and Salim brought him home. His mother received him with compassionate tenderness: he sought to respond to her entreaties to stay. But, as before, the frenzy re-possessed him. He kissed his mother's feet and fled: and her heart, like his father's, broke. She died: Majnun was alone. For love he had abandoned all who loved him.

Laila, on her part, suffered with increasing intensity. It seemed to her that she must at least look on Majnun, or die. One evening, she succeeded in eluding the harem-guard and stole out of the gate. A holy man, a hermit, came by: he knew Majnun and pitied him. And Laila implored him to contrive that they should meet. He consented; sought out Majnun, and led him to the appointed meeting-place, the grove of palms. But when the hermit came to tell Laila that he was come, she shrank back. She was a married woman; they must not meet. But if he would chant one of his songs that she might hear, that at least might be permitted her. So the hermit told Majnun; and, intoxicated by the nearness of her presence, he sang to her, and she listened: and that was all the joy they had.

The story of Majnun and his martyrdom to love had become noised abroad over the land and as far as Baghdad. And from that city there came riding a youth, consumed with desire to see this miracle of constancy and sorrow. He was welcomed gravely, the wild animals who kept Majnun company were stilled by a lifted hand and the purpose of his coming asked. The youth did all he could to win the madman's favour, offered him cakes and wine, and then strove to persuade him that love, as his own experience had proved, was but a fleeting thing; when it became a grief, it should be flung away. But Majnun told him he talked of what he knew not: and after staying a few days in the desert place, the youth perceived his error and left Majnun alone with his troop of wild creatures.

So time went on: till one day Laila heard the sound of wailing in the house and knew that her husband was dead. She wept; but her tears were not for Ibn Salam. For him now, by the law of her race, she must observe two years of mourning. And for two whole years she remained within her house, unseen, as if in a continuous night of darkness. At last the long night was over: she emerged into the day; she was free to avow her love without shame, she was filled with overpowering happiness. And she called to her Zayd, a youth whom she had befriended because he too was an unfortunate lover, and employed sometimes as a messenger to Majnun, and sent him now with the great tidings and a prayer that Majnun would come to her.

The longed-for moment approaches, arrives. The lovers meet; there is no hindrance any more to their joy. But when they saw each other, they fainted away, overcome by the excess of their emotion. Coming to their senses, they fell into each other's arms and for long sat embraced, but unable to speak a word. Laila first found a voice, and tenderly reproached her beloved: What grief held him mute, who had sung to her such heavenly strains? Now, when they were met at last and were alone, had his love vanished with his voice? Majnun wept a flood of tears: the ecstasy of her presence was too great for one who had lived so long in the dream of union; he felt himself a shadow, unequal to reality. Then for a moment bliss came to him; he bathed in the beauty of his adored one, he drank in the fullness of her love. But scarcely had he tasted of that rapture when suddenly his voice failed, his looks altered. The madness returned upon him: he rent his dress, and with a wild cry fled into the desert. Was it madness, or illumination—the knowledge that his love, for so many years nourished on dreams in solitude, had become a thing that imagination only could satisfy and that could find no fruition on earth?

Laila heard his cry and knew that this was the end. Nothing now could cure her lover's delirium. Her heart was broken: she languished, and having no more hope, died. And Zayd, beating his breast, brought the news to Majnun, where he wandered with his train of wild animals in the desert. He fell to the ground, as if a blow had struck him. When he came to himself, he rose and made his way over burning sands and through wild thickets and across the hills till he saw the tomb of Laila. Crawling to it, he clasped the stone and lamented a long time. Then suddenly the fit seized him to dash away, he knew not where: and then again he rushed back to the grave of his Beloved, and lay there, grieving and fasting till his body was quite wasted away. "O God, set free my spirit," was his unceasing prayer. And so he died; and so they found him, clinging to Laila's grave with his arms outstretched upon it.

It is rather strange that so few of the paintings in the manuscript are devoted to the story of Laila and Majnun: there are only two. These are:

Plate XII.—Majnun brought to the tent of Laila. By Mir Sayyid Ali. This illustrates an episode of the time when Majnun was contriving stratagems to gain access to Laila in her strictly-guarded retreat among the hills. Chancing to meet an old woman who led about in chains a beggar pretending to be mad, and so made a living from charity, Majnun persuaded her to let him take the beggar's place, hoping in this guise to find some means of seeing his beloved. But when they came to the tent where Laila was, his madness came upon him, and he fell down wailing at the door, then leapt up and burst his fetters.

In this painting we see the old woman leading the frail Majnun by a cord round his neck, while a dog barks and little boys throw stones at him. But who would guess what a poignant moment was depicted? For at first sight we hardly notice the wasted figure in the foreground, as our eyes take in with delight the whole scene; the white tents with their rich hangings, the evening quiet, the women busy preparing a meal, the herdsmen milking sheep or playing on the pipe: a world so unconcerned with the poor lover's passion. The oblique lines of the tents and the tent-cords are admirably used to give strength and character to the design.

Plates XIII.—Majnun in the desert surrounded by the wild animals. The name of Mirak is inscribed on the painting. An interesting design, made up, in its formal sense, of rounds and loops and ovals, without a single straight line. The wild animals are not so well painted as in some of the other miniatures; the tiger is almost grotesque. Yet the whole is charming.

The poem has furnished themes for innumerable representations in painting and in other forms of Persian art. A few of the favourite scenes may be mentioned here. In the Nizami manuscript of 1494 (in the British Museum, Or. 6810,) there is a delightful picture of the school in which the story begins. How different from the kind of school-room most of us remember is the courtyard, open to the air and sun, with a great plane-tree, the foliage of which the Persians always paint with especial delight, spreading its branches overhead. The pupils sit in little groups at their lessons. In the same manuscript is an unusually dramatic design of the scene of lamentation at the death of Laila's husband. The paintings in this manuscript have been attributed in Persia to Bihzad and Mirak, whose names have been written under the paintings, though the actual signature of another artist, Qasim Ali, is to be found on one of the miniatures. The scenes in the desert in this book are of great beauty, particularly one in which the forlorn Majnun lies prone on the herbage that fringes a little stream, while beyond is the camp of Laila; an old woman spins in a tent, and against the gold sky a herdboy, sitting on a rock, plays his pipe. An episode which is often depicted is the battle in the desert, with the helpless Majnun looking on. The finest painting I know of this subject, probably by Bihzad, is in a small manuscript also in the British Museum (Add. 25900) astonishing for its fine delicacy as well for its nervous force. In this manuscript we find also the visit to the Ka'aba at Mecca; a striking design.

But the painting which more than any other expresses the tragic passion of the poem is in a manuscript in the Public Library at Leningrad. It is reproduced by Martin (Plate 79), and again by Kühnel in "Miniaturmalerei im Islamischen Orient," Plate 53. Here, though, as usual, we find a stream in the wilderness bordered by flowers, trickling down from the rocks, there is a sense of the stark desert, with its meagre brushwood, its burning sand and stone; and while lion and leopard crouch watching, and a lean camel drinks of the stream, Laila sits on the ground and holds on her lap the head of her lover, and looks down with despairing pity on his wasted form. This is attributed to Bihzad, and is worthy of his fame.

THE SEVEN PORTRAITS

This is the latest in date of the Five Poems, though in the manuscript it comes before the Book of Alexander. (See F. von Erdmann, "Bahram-Gur und die Russische Fuerstentochter," Berlin, 1844.)

The Haft Paykar or Seven Portraits is concerned with the story of Bahram Gur, that Sasanian king whose name has become familiar to English readers through Fitzgerald's translation of Omar.

> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep;
> And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
> Stamps o'er his head, and he lies fast asleep.

The Seven Portraits are the portraits of seven beautiful princesses, the daughters of the monarchs of India, of China, of Tartary, of Khwarazm, the Emperor of Byzantium, the King of the Slavs, and the King of the Lands of the Sunset. Bahram one day, while he was yet a prince and had not yet come to the throne, discovers these portraits in a secret chamber of his castle. Straightway, with a princely liberality of heart, he falls in love with them all. Soon after, his father dies and he succeeds to the throne of Persia. Sending envoys in all directions to the Courts of the Seven Monarchs, he demands each of the seven princesses in marriage and has the felicity of winning them all. These incomparable beauties arrive, and each is installed in a separate pavilion, distinguished by symbolic colours. The Indian princess was in the black pavilion, dedicated to Saturn; the Moorish princess in the yellow pavilion, dedicated to the Sun; the Tartar princess in the green pavilion of the Moon; the Slav princess in the red pavilion, sacred to Mars; the princess of Khwarazm in Mercury's blue pavilion; the Chinese princess in Jupiter's sandal-wood coloured pavilion; the Greek princess in the white pavilion, dedicated to Venus. On each day of the week, beginning with Saturday, Bahram visited one of the fair princesses, wearing a dress of the appropriate colour. He spent a day with each in turn; and each entertained him with a story.

The artists who have illustrated this romance have found an admirable motive for decorative design in those pavilions with their dominant symbolic colours. But the main theme of Nizami's poem is the exploits of Bahram; the paintings in our manuscript are concerned with his prowess as a hunter; and, unfortunately, we have no pictures of the pavilions of the seven colours.

First, however, we encounter somewhat unexpectedly a very different subject, the Ascent of the Prophet to Heaven (Plate XIV). This painting has, of course, nothing to do with the story, but illustrates one of the preliminary sections with which, by traditional prescription, the Persian poet dedicates his work to the Creator and prays for inspiration. A description of Muhammad's journey to Heaven, while still alive, is a theme often introduced in these preliminary flights. It occurs also in the Book of Alexander, forming the fourth canto, and has been translated literally into prose by Colonel Wilberforce Clarke. It is called "The Night of the Ascent of Muhammad, the Chosen One," and describes how on a night so splendid with stars that it rivalled the day, the Prophet freed himself from the affections of the world and the shackles of the elements, and—

> A Buraq, the hastener, lightning-like, beneath him,
> His housings, like the sun, bathed in light,—

leapt from earth and rode upward into the Seventh Heaven. The blackness of the sky became for him a rose garden: "he passed beyond the roof of the sky, and folded the leaf of Earth and Time"; and he beheld the Majesty of the Presence of God. "His body, which is more pure than our souls," came and went around the world in a moment. "Was it a night; or, indeed, was it a year?"

Martin calls this page "the most magnificent painting ever produced in Persia." In any case it is a glorious work and by far the finest representation I have seen of the subject. Mounted on Buraq[8] and preceded by the Archangel Gabriel, the Prophet, from whose head streams a fiery radiance shredded into little flames, emerges from the clouds into the profound blue of the night, sown with stars. The dwindled Earth swims far away below him; and from all quarters of the sky winged angels in coloured garments rush down to bear him company, or float before him, swinging censers, or bearing offerings in their hands. The whole design is thrilled with an ecstatic movement: we seem lifted up into the air as we look on it, and move among those transfigured and ethereal beings.

Compared with the greatest religious pictures, whether of East or West, this may be thought to lack something of spirituality in its conception, to be thought voluptuous in its rapture. But no one, while he looks at it, will want to find a fault in it, for in its own way it is incomparable and triumphant.

Who is the painter of this marvellous work? It bears no signature nor attribution. It is ascribed by Kühnel to Mirak; but it seems to me more likely, from its imagination for movement and from the fluid grace of the drawing, to be by Sultan Muhammad, the author of the next miniature.

We now descend to earth and the exploits of Bahram Gur.

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[8] Buraq, "the meanest of the steeds of Paradise," is described as an animal larger than an ass, but less than a mule, the face resembling that of a man. . . On his thighs he had two wings; when these were expanded they included between them all from east to west." (Wilberforce Clarke: "The Sikander Nama e Bara," p. 32, note.)

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Plate XV.—Bahram hunting the lion. By Sultan Muhammad. The lion and the leopard are unusually well drawn; with much truer sense of character than, for instance, in the painting of Majnun in the Desert (Plate XIII). We feel also that this artist is a master in the suggestion of rapid and buoyant motion. At the left appears, riding between two pages, a girl musician playing on a harp. She is the heroine of the next picture.

The subject of this brilliant page, reproduced on Plate XVI, is frequently pictured in Persian art. Bahram was often accompanied on his hunting expeditions by a favourite musician, a Tartar girl called Fitna. One day, in a boasting mood, he asked her what feat he should accomplish to please her. She pointed to a wild ass, and said: "Transfix its hind hoof and its ear with a single arrow." "Good," said he; and he shot a pellet of clay and grazed the creature's ear without hurting it. The wild ass put up its hind foot to scratch the ear, and at that very moment the King shot again and triumphantly pinned hoof and ear together. But when he turned to his favourite, expecting her dazzled applause, she only smiled mockingly and said: "Of course, practice makes perfect." Enraged at this saucy answer, Bahram ordered Fitna's death. But the courtier into whose charge she was given was persuaded to spare her and hid her in a secluded hunting lodge, where she lived forgotten by her master. Time went on; till one day, on an expedition, Bahram chanced in a remote village to see an extraordinary sight: a veiled woman carrying on her shoulders a full-grown cow up a flight of sixty stairs. He inquired into the matter and discovered that this was his former harpist. Fitna was brought before him and questioned: and she told how she had carried up those stairs a new-born calf, and though it grew heavier every day she found herself able by practice to carry it each morning up the stairs, even now when it was full-grown. "You see, Sire," she ended up, "Practice makes perfect." Bahram was delighted with her wit and she was restored to favour. This last incident is the subject of a painting of much later date, inserted in the manuscript but not here reproduced.

There are two other illustrations to the Bahram story in the manuscript, but these also we have forborne to reproduce. One is a picture of Bahram slaying the Dragon;[9] the other of Bahram and a princess (in European dress) supping under trees by moonlight.[10] These are both painted under strong European influence, especially the last, with its elaborate chiaroscuro. There is not the least attempt to conform to the style of the earlier miniatures: and the costume is that of the later time. They are both signed by Muhammad Zaman and dated with the year corresponding to 1680 A.D. Martin reproduces two unfortunate copies by this artist from European religious pictures (Plate 173.) Muhammad Zaman was sent to Rome and returned to Persia as a Christian, calling himself Paolo Zaman. He was exiled and found a refuge in India under the protection of Shah Jahan. He lived on into the reign of Aurangzib. (See Martin, Vol. I, p. 124). Presumably these paintings were made in India. They may well have been inserted in the manuscript by the Shah Fath Ali, who reigned from 1797 to 1834. At that time paintings in this bastard style were preferred above the finest masterpieces of Bihzad, Mirak and Sultan Muhammad.

THE BOOK OF ALEXANDER

The fifth poem in the manuscript is the "Book of Alexander." As there are no illustrations to this poem, I need say little about it. It is in two parts. Of the first part there is a literal translation by Colonel Wilberforce Clarke, published in 1881. It is hardly necessary to say that the legendary story of Alexander current in Oriental countries has little in common with the facts of history. The first part of Nizami's poem is a narration of Alexander's conquests by land. The second part, which is missing in some manuscripts and is less known, is concerned with the hero as sage and as prophet. A detailed account of its contents is given by Dr. Bacher. We see Alexander as a Persian monarch consulting with the Seven Wise Men of Greece; this is a frequent subject for illustration. The Seven were chosen with a truly Oriental disregard for dates; they are Aristotle, the King's Vizier; Apollonius of Tyana; Socrates; Plato; Thales; Porphyrius, and Hermes. Alexander, from being a pupil, becomes himself a sage; and having compassed the range of human knowledge, is ready to receive the gift of Prophecy. An angel visits him and tells him that the Creator designs to send him as his ambassador to all the peoples of the world, summoning them to quit their evil ways and to turn to God. He starts on his great journey, and first goes West; to Jerusalem and Egypt, thence by Africa to Andalusia and to the Ocean, the bounds of the world. Next he discovers the sources of the Nile. He journeys South and sees many marvels. Then he turns East to India and to China. Finally he journeys North, where he builds a wall against Gog and Magog, and comes at last to a sort of earthly paradise inhabited by people who live in simple faith and innocence of heart, a world such as Shelley imagined in his "Prometheus Unbound" and social philosophers have pictured in their Utopias. The lesson the former conqueror learns from these people seems to him the greatest treasure that he has found. "In vain," he thinks, "have I circled the world in my travels; I should have dwelt in some nook of the mountains and found the true good of life in contemplation and solitude." The poem ends with Alexander's sickness and death.

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[9] Reproduced by T. W. Arnold: "Painting in Islam," Plate V. [10] Reproduced by Vincent A. Smith: "A history of fine Art in India and Ceylon," Plate CXVI.

Episodes from the Book of Alexander are illustrated by paintings in the Nizami manuscript of 1494 in the British Museum, and, of course, in many other manuscripts. It is regrettable that none was chosen by the painters employed on the manuscript here described. Fantastic and rather puerile as are some of the marvellous incidents in the poem, one cannot but be impressed by the direction in which the spirit moves Nizami, and the form into which he moulds the material he derived from Jewish, Greek and Christian sources. The Western mind has thought no pains too great to be taken, if Alexander's marches can be precisely mapped, his strategy elucidated, the sites of his battles identified. But to this Eastern poet such things are of no moment. Alexander could not be a true world-hero if he was merely a taker of cities and a devastator of countries; he must be a God-sent warrior commissioned to make war on the ignorance, the follies and the crimes of men. Even more than a conqueror, he was a great civiliser. And so Nizami lifts him from his heathen world, and adopts him, much as Christendom adopted Virgil into its own faith, among the prophets of his own religion.

It may be noticed that on the borders of the colour plates in this book certain marks appear which are not part of the design. It should be explained that these are due to the clips which held the pages in position while they were being photographed. The valuable manuscript had, of necessity, to be held in this way, and as cutting out the clip marks would have entailed also cutting into the borders it was thought preferable to leave them.

PLATE I

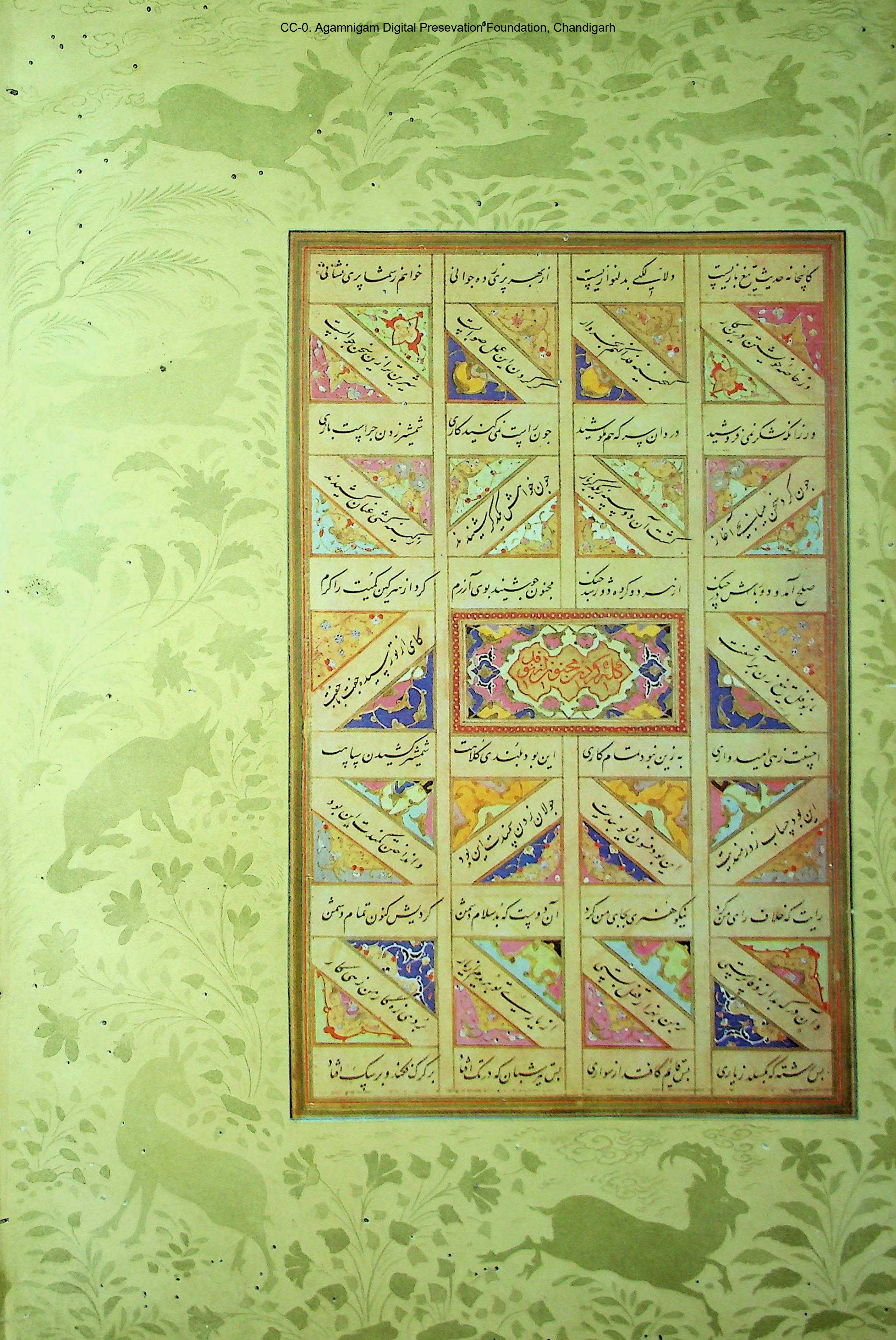
Page of Text and Decoration

گر او را پوی گوهر گرم شد رای
نسب داران گوهر ماند بر جای
گر او را فیض رحمت گشت ساقی
جهان وارثانش باد باقی
گر او را داد خاک از تخته بندی
بتاج تخت گیر از اکزندی
گر او بی تاج شد تاجش رضا باد
پسران تاجدار از ابقا باد
خصوصا وارث اعمار شاهان
نظرگاه دعای نیک خواهان
موید نصرة الدین کافرینش
زنام او پذیرد نور بینش
پناه خسروان اعظم اتابک
فریدون دار بر عالم مبارک
بشاهی تاج بخش تاجداران
بدولت یادگار شهریاران
بدانامیش هفت اختر شکرخند
بمولاییش گردون کمر بند
ستاره پایه بخت بلندش
فلک را بوسه که سم سمندش
پسر بریش باد در کشور خدایی
و شیعت نامه کشور کشایی
جهان را تا ابد شاه جهان باد
بدانچه امید دارد کامران باد
سعادت یار او در کامرانی
مساعد با سعادت زندگانی
سخن را بر سعادت ختم کردم
ورق کاینجا رسانم در نوردم
روانش باد جنت شاد کامی
که گوید باد رحمت بر نظامی

تمت الکتاب بعون الملک الوهاب علی ید احقر العباد
شاه محمود النیشابوری غفر الله ذنوبه و ستر عیوبه فی سلخ
شهر ربیع الاول سنه سبع و اربعین و تسعمایه الهجریه النبویه

PLATE II

Page of Text and Decoration
Folio 153 of the manuscript



کانجا نه حدیث تیغ بازیست
دلاله‌گی بدلنوازیست
از بهر پری ده جوانی
خواهم ز رمه پری نشانی

وز خاصه [illegible] تن و سنگی
بشنید [illegible] انجمن سوار
[illegible] کردن این عمل صوابست
شیرین‌تر ازین سخن جوابست

وز زانکه شکر نمی فروشید
ور دان پسر که هم کوشید
چون رایت نمی‌کشید کاری
شمشیر زدن چرا است باری

چون کرد سخن میانجی آغاز
[illegible] آن دو سپه [illegible]
چون خواهش پیک بشنیدند
[illegible] کشتی عنان کشیدند

صلح آمد و دور باش در جنگ
از بهر دو گروه شد ز بد جنگ
مجنون چو شنید بوی آزرم
گرد از سر کین کمیت را گرم

با نوفل تیغ زن برآشفت

گله کردن مجنون از نوفل

کای از تو رسیده جفت با جفت

اینست رهی امیدواری
به زین نبود تمام کاری
این بود بلندی کلاهت
شمشیر کشیدن سپاهت

این بود حساب زورمندیت
این بود فسون دیو بندیت
جولان زدن سمندت این بود
وانداختن کمندت این بود

رایت که خلاف رای من کرد
نیکو هنری بجای من کرد
آن دوست که بد سلام دشمن
گردیدش کنون تمام دشمن

وان [illegible] که بد از وفا [illegible] پیچی
[illegible] ز دل [illegible] پیچی
از یار [illegible]
[illegible] دشمنی [illegible] کاری

بس تشنه که گنبد زیاری
بس تن که بیم کافت از سواری
بس تیر شبان که در تک افتاد
بر گرگ فکند و بر سگ افتاد

PLATE III

Nushirwan listening to the
owls on the ruined palace
By Mirak

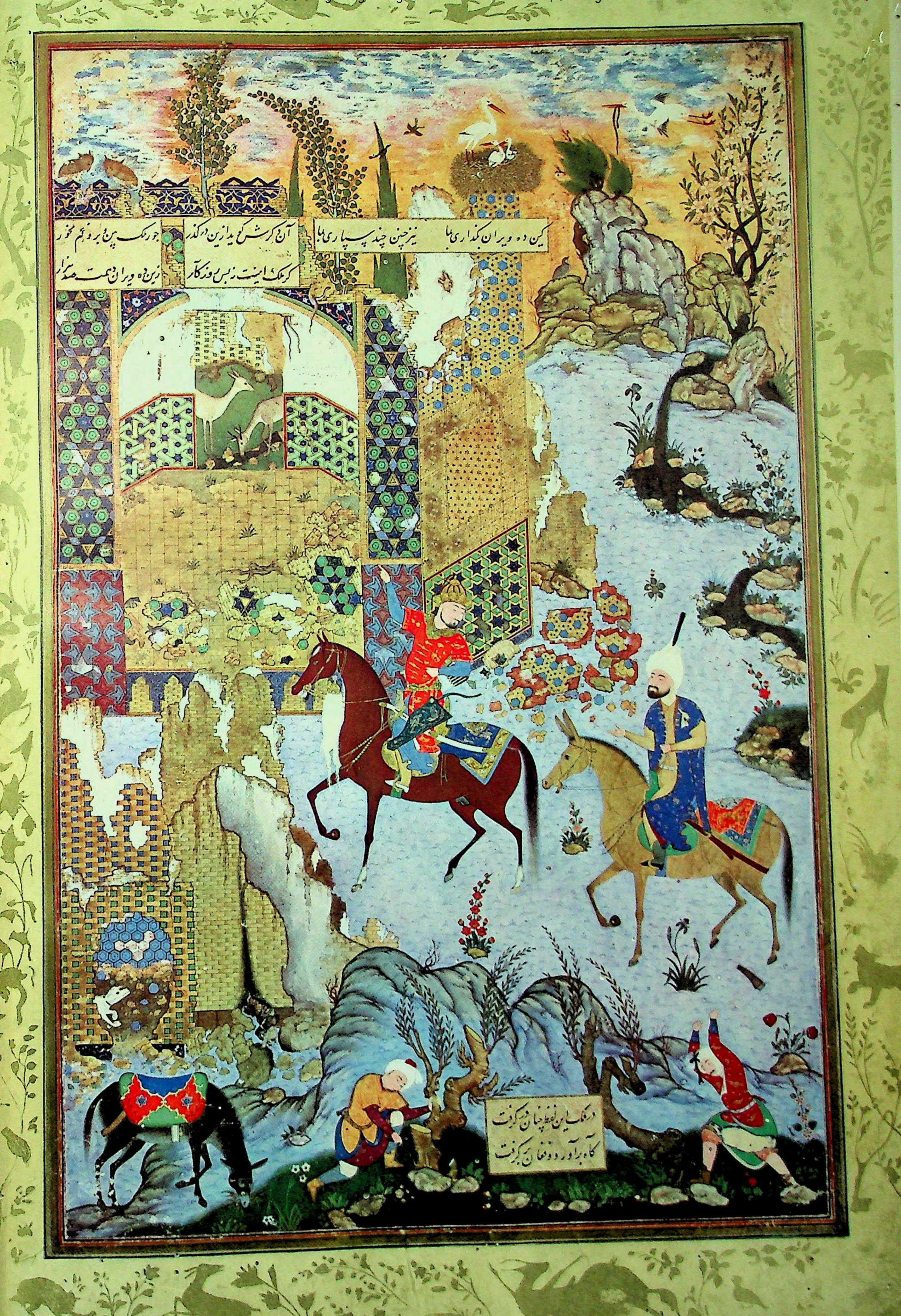

کین ده ویران بگذاری بما
نیز چنین چند سپاری بما
آن دگرش گفت کزین درگذر
گر ملک اینست نه بس روزگار
جور ملک بین و برو غم مخور
زین ده ویران دهمت صد هزار
در ملک این لفظ چنان درگرفت
کآه برآورد و فغان برگرفت

PLATE IV

The old woman complaining to
Sultan Sanjar

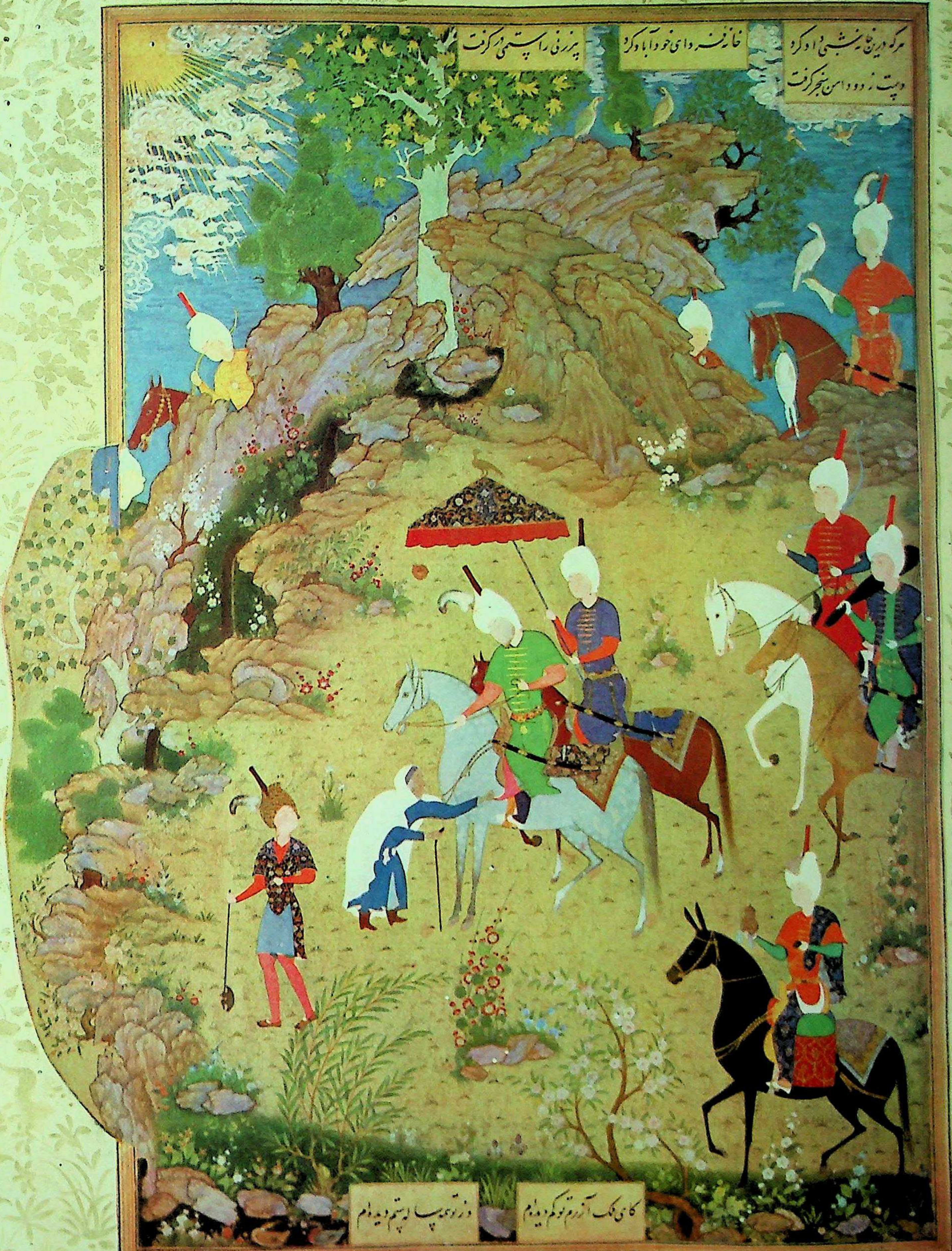
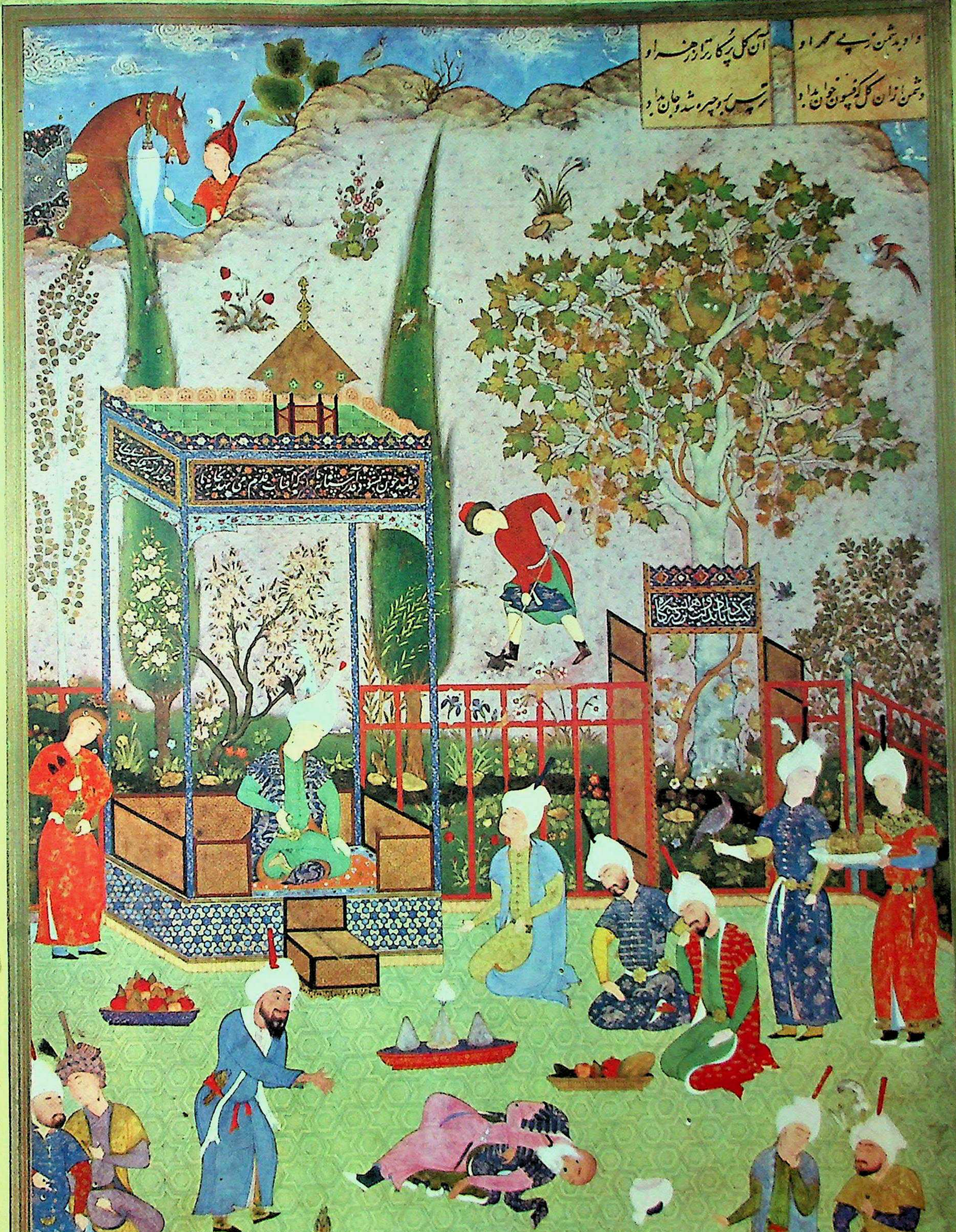

هر که درین خانه شبی داد کرد
خانه فردای خود آباد کرد
پیرزنی را ستمی در گرفت
دست زد و دامن سنجر گرفت
کای ملک آزرم تو کم دیده‌ام
وز تو همه ساله ستم دیده‌ام

PLATE V

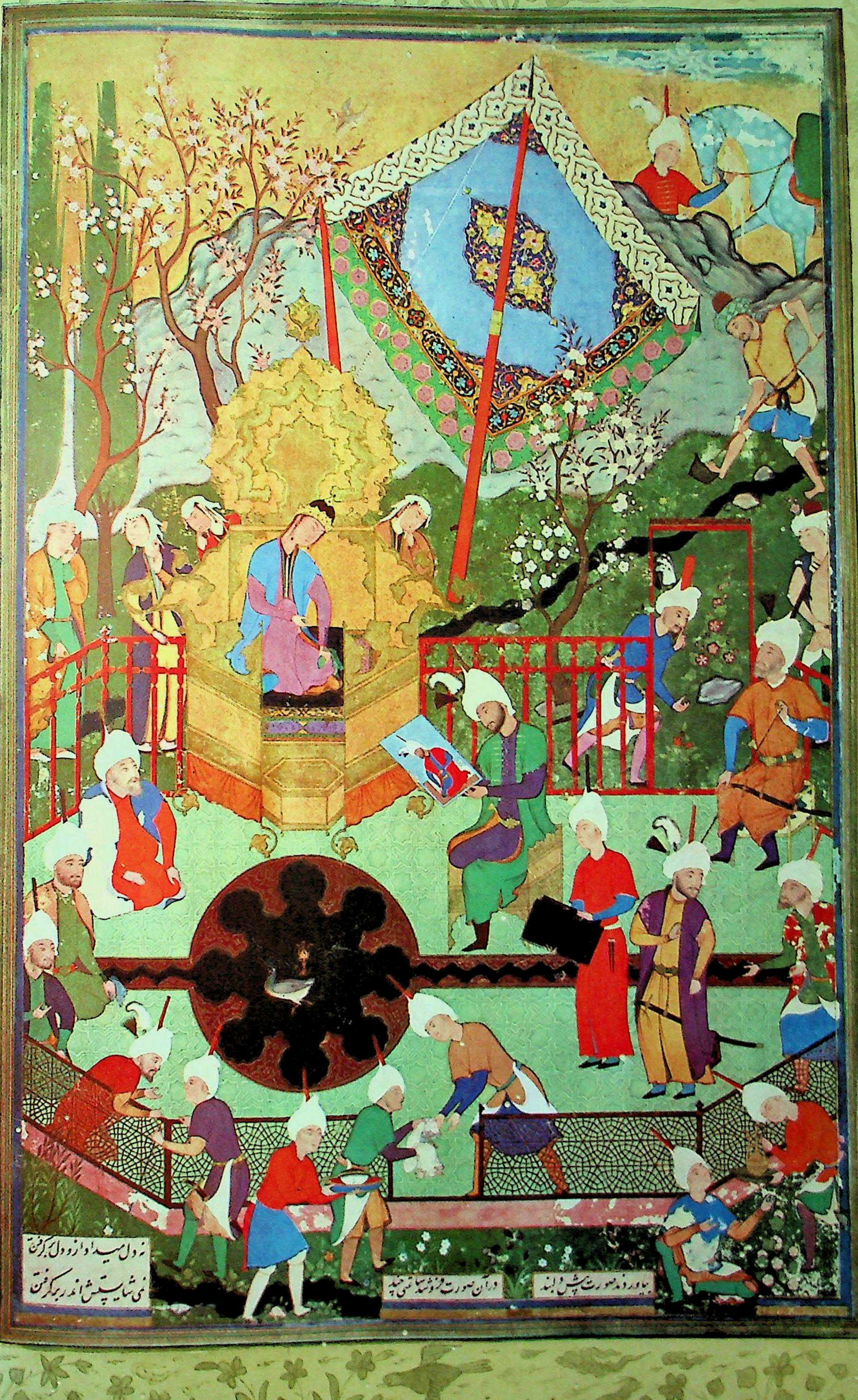
The physicians' duel


داد به دشمن ز پی مهر او
آن گل پرکارتر از چهرهٔ او
دشمن از آن گل که فسون خوانده بود
ترس برو چیره شد و جان بداد
آن علاج از تن خود زهر برد
وین ز یکی گل بتوهم بمرد

State Museum,
LUCKNOW.

PLATE VI

The portrait of Khosru shown to
Shirin by Shapur.   By Mirza Ali


نه دل میداد ازو دل برگرفتن
نی شایستش اندر برگرفتن
بیاوردند صورت پیش دلبند
در آن صورت فرو شد ساعتی چند

State Museum,
LUCKNOW.

PLATE VII
Shirin bathing, seen by Khosru
By Sultan Muhammad

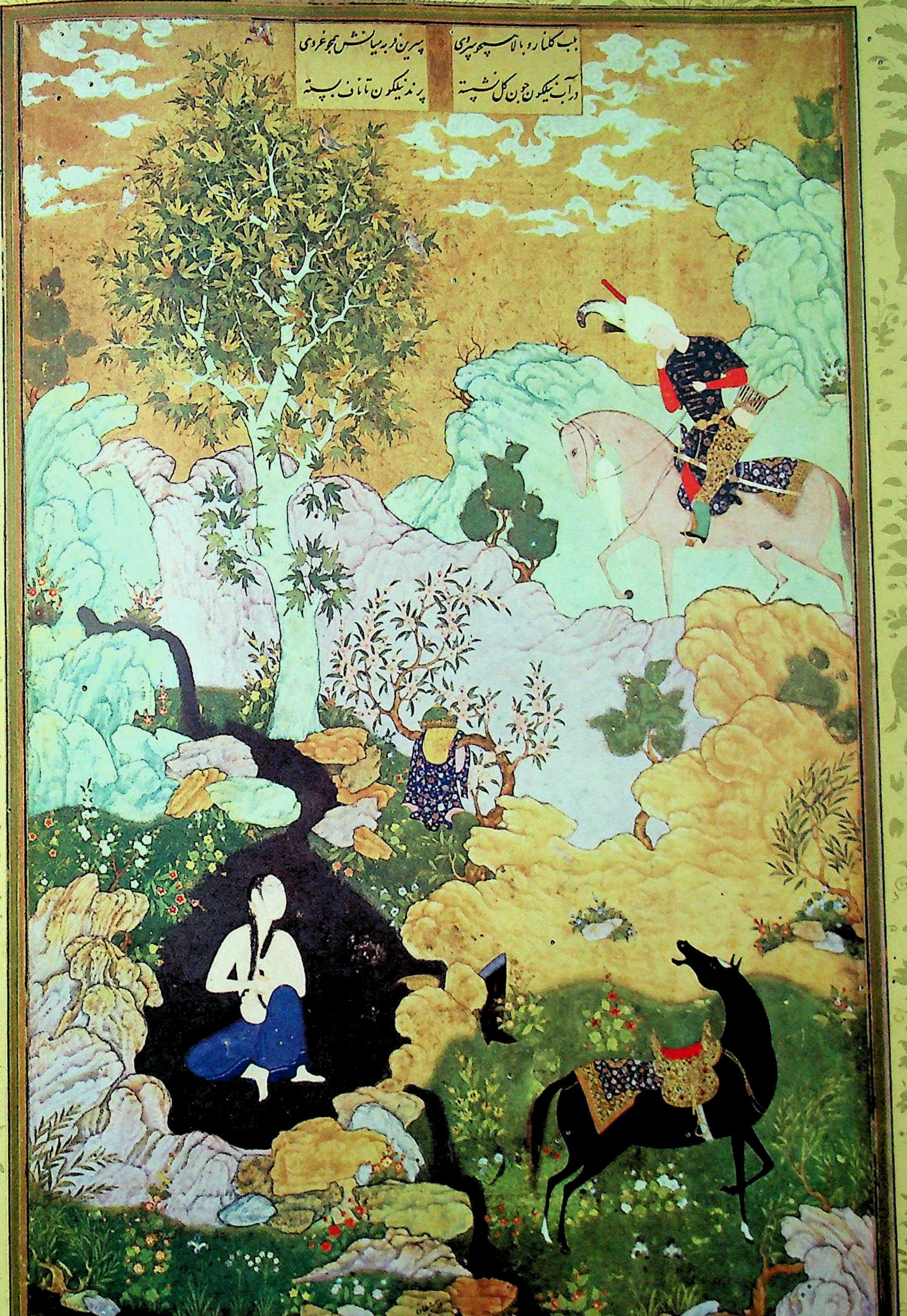
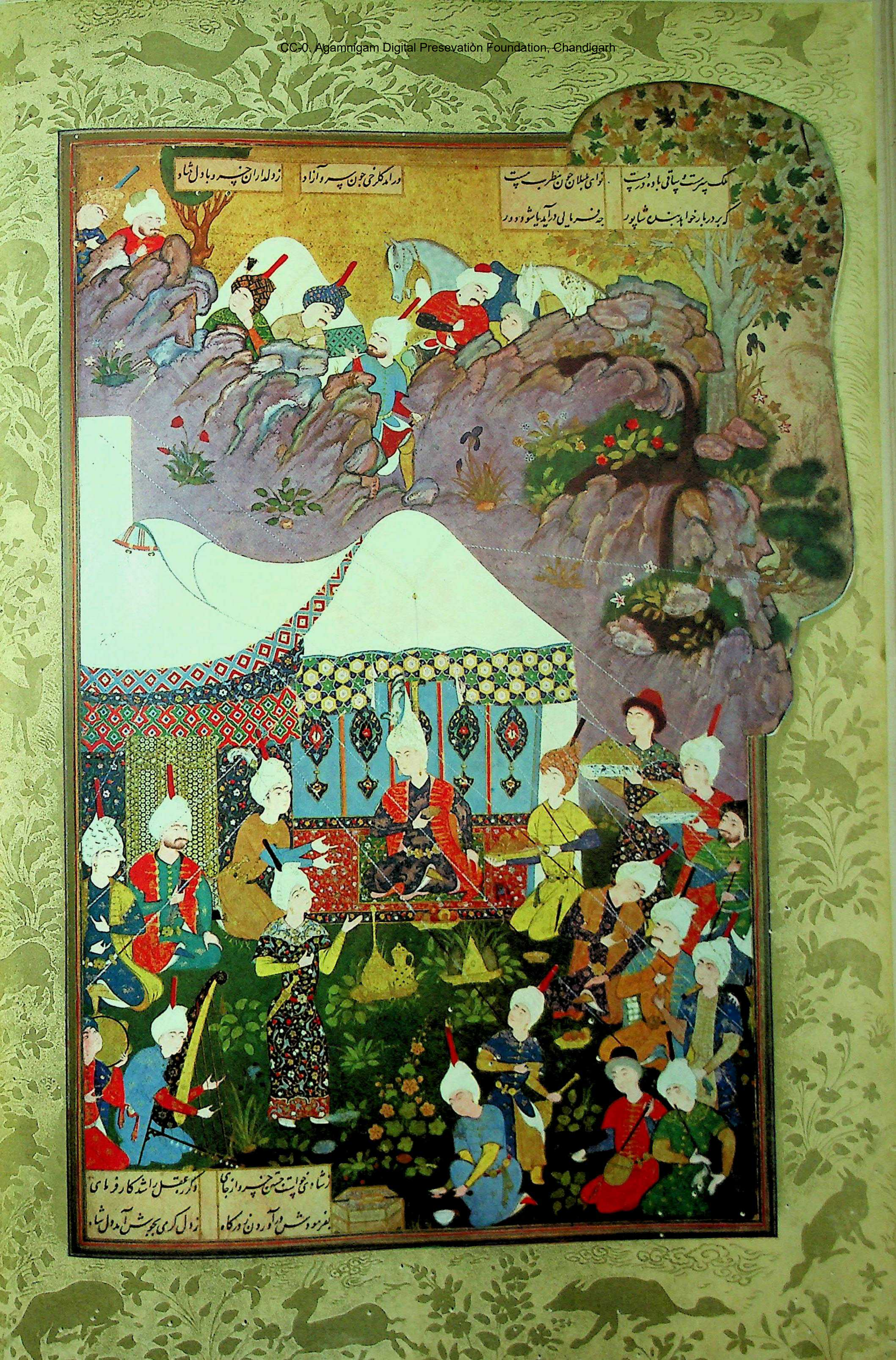

بلب گلنار و بالا سرو پروی
پرین قر به میانش همچو غردی
در آب نیلگون چون گل نشسته
پرندی نیلگون تا ناف بسته
زهر سو شاخ گیسو شانه می کرد
بنفشه بر سر گل دانه می کر

PLATE VIII

The return of Shapur to Khosru

By Mirak


ملک پرست و پیاله باده در دست
نوای بلبلان چون مطرب مست
که بر دربار خواهد بند شاپور
چه فرمایی درآید یا شود دور
درآمد گلرخی چون سرو آزاد
ز دلداران چنین پر و باد دل شاد
ز شاهی خواست جستن چنبر از جای
دگر عقلش باشد کارفرمای
بفرمودش درآوردن درگاه
ز دل کری بجوشش آمد دل شاه

State Museum,
LUCKNOW.

PLATE IX

Khosru enthroned. By Mirak

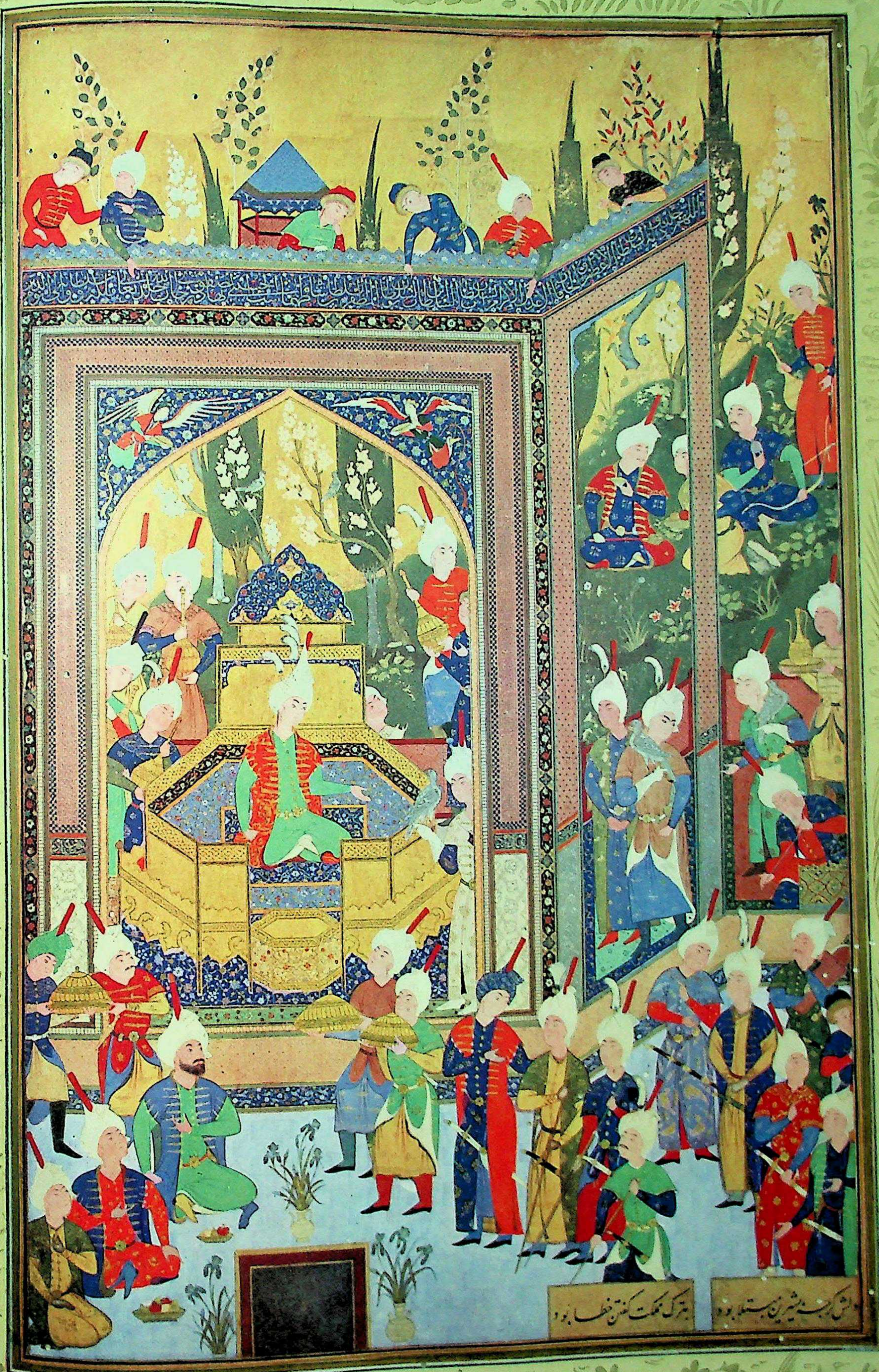

بهتر که حکمت گفتن خطا بود
دانش که به شیرین مستطرف بود

PLATE X

Khosru and Shirin listening at night to stories told by Shirin's maids.

By Mirak

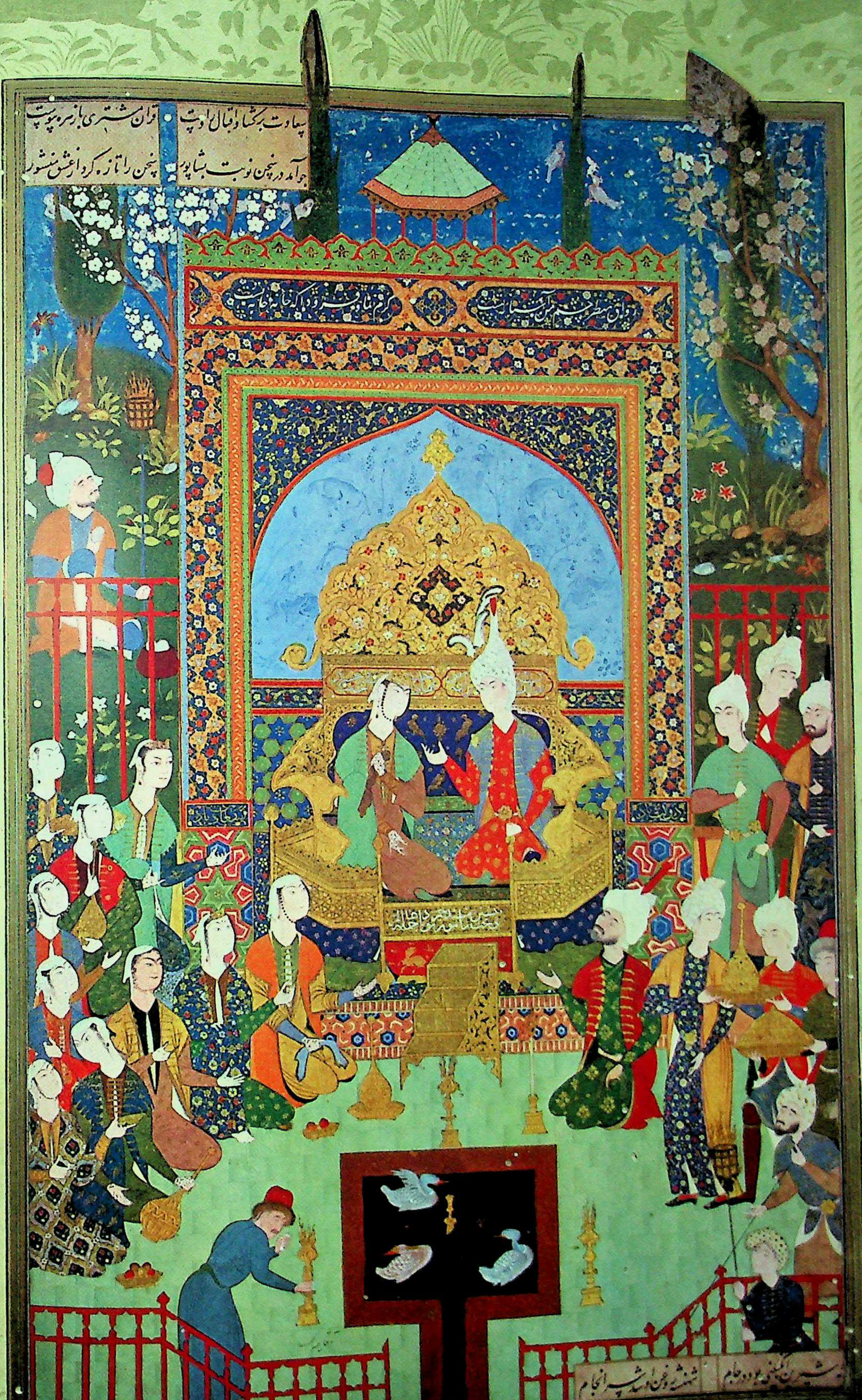

سعادت برگشاد اقبال را دست قران مشتری با زهره پیوست
چو آمد در چنین نوبت بشاپور چنین را تازه کرد از عشق منشور

PLATE XI

Barbad playing music to Khosru.
By Mirza Ali

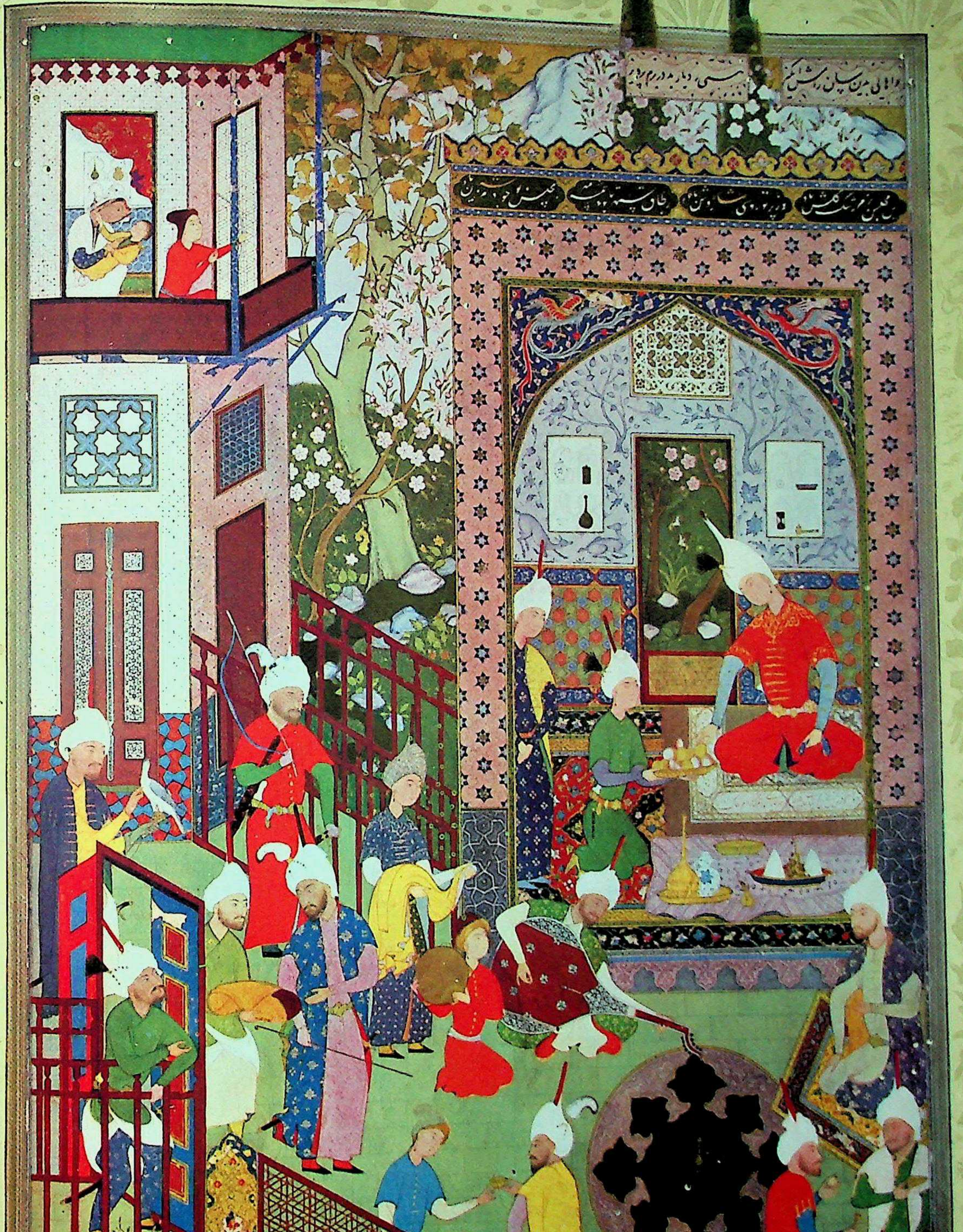
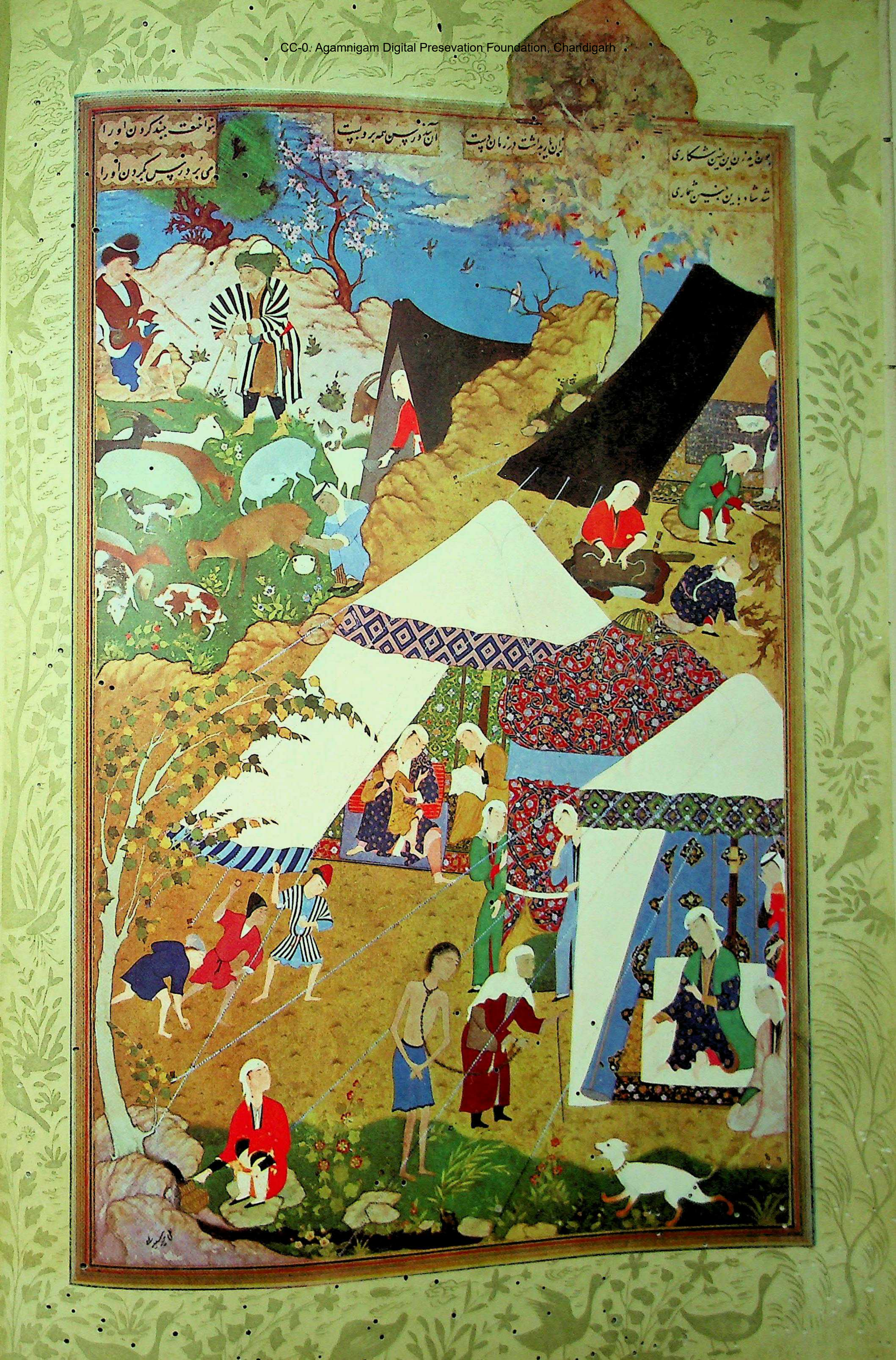

عمل بهزاد

PLATE XII

Majnun in chains brought by a beggar woman to Laila's tent

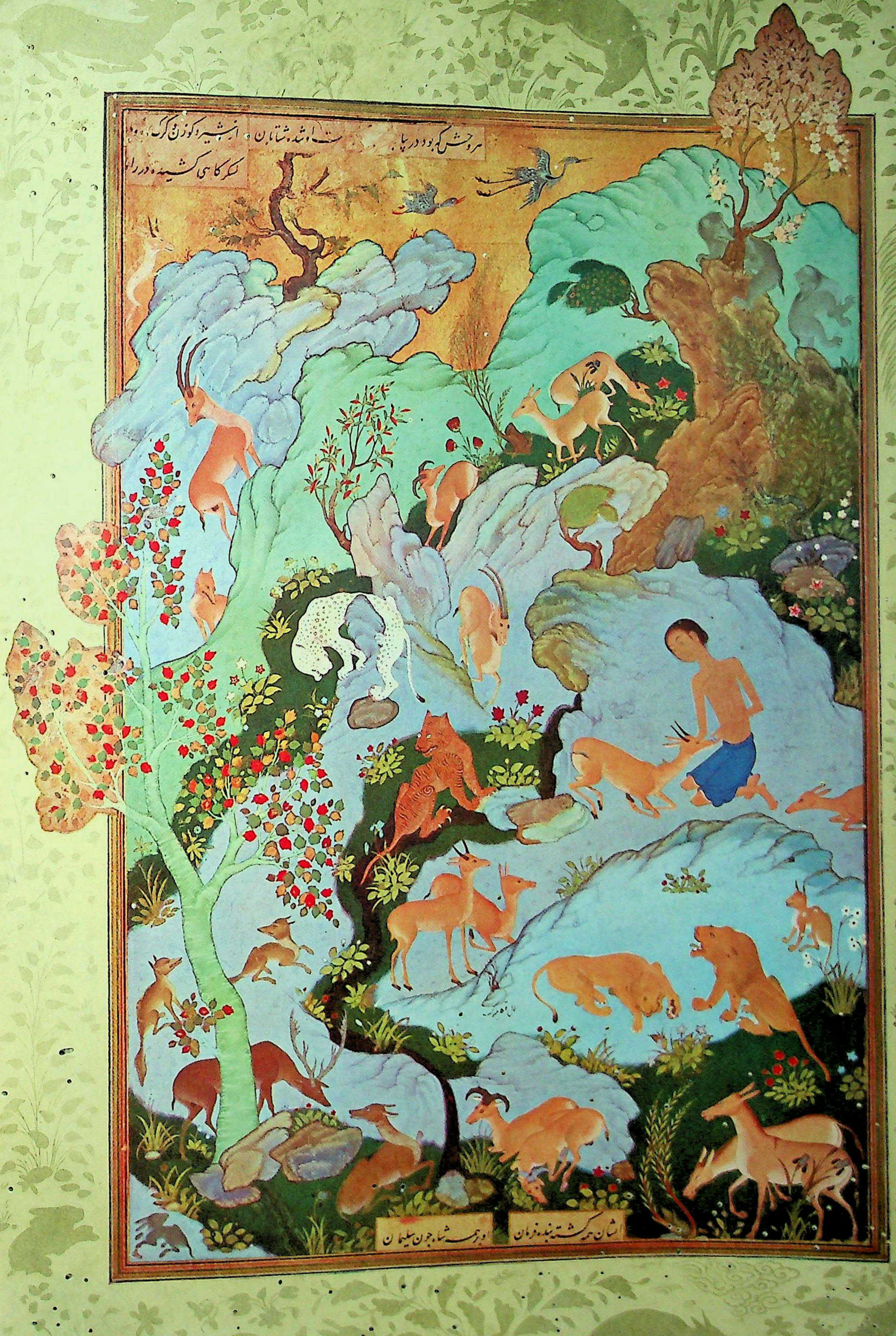
By Mir Sayyid Ali


چون دید زن این چنین شکاری
شد شاد بدین چنین شماری
زان پای بداشت در زمان پست
آن آهن در پس همه بر و پست
بنواخت ببند کردن او را
می برد ز پس بگردن او را

State Museum,
LUCKNOW.

PLATE XIII

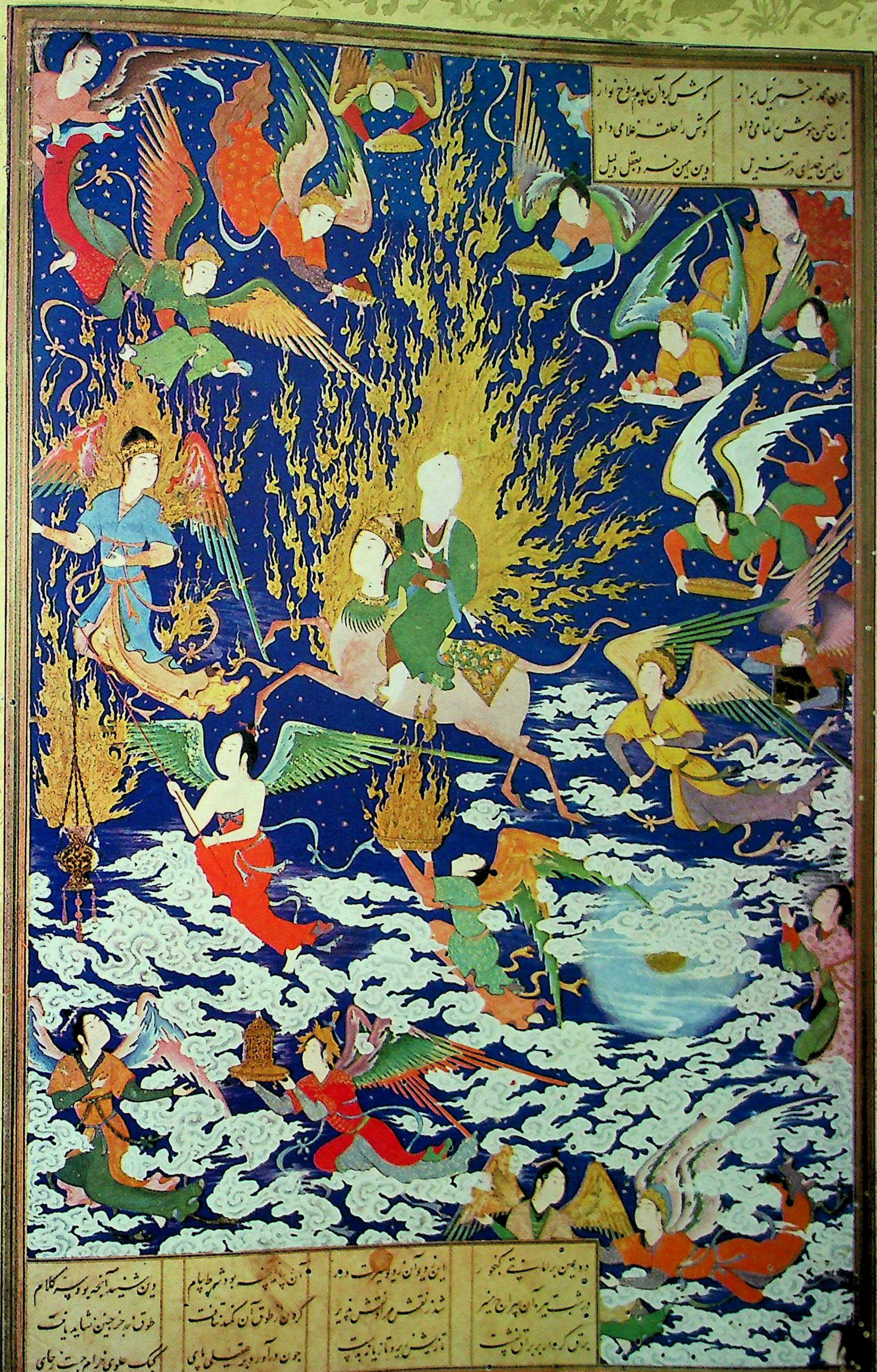
Majnun in the Desert, among the wild animals. By Mirak


هر وحش که بود در پا
ت او شده شتابان
از شیر و گوزن و گرگ و
لشکرگاهی کشیده در را
ایشان همه گشته بنده فرمان
او بر همه شاه چون سلیمان

State. Museum.
LUCKNOW.

PLATE XIV

The Ascent of the Prophet to Heaven



State Museum,
LUCKNOW.

PLATE XV

Bahram hunting the lion

By Sultan Muhammad

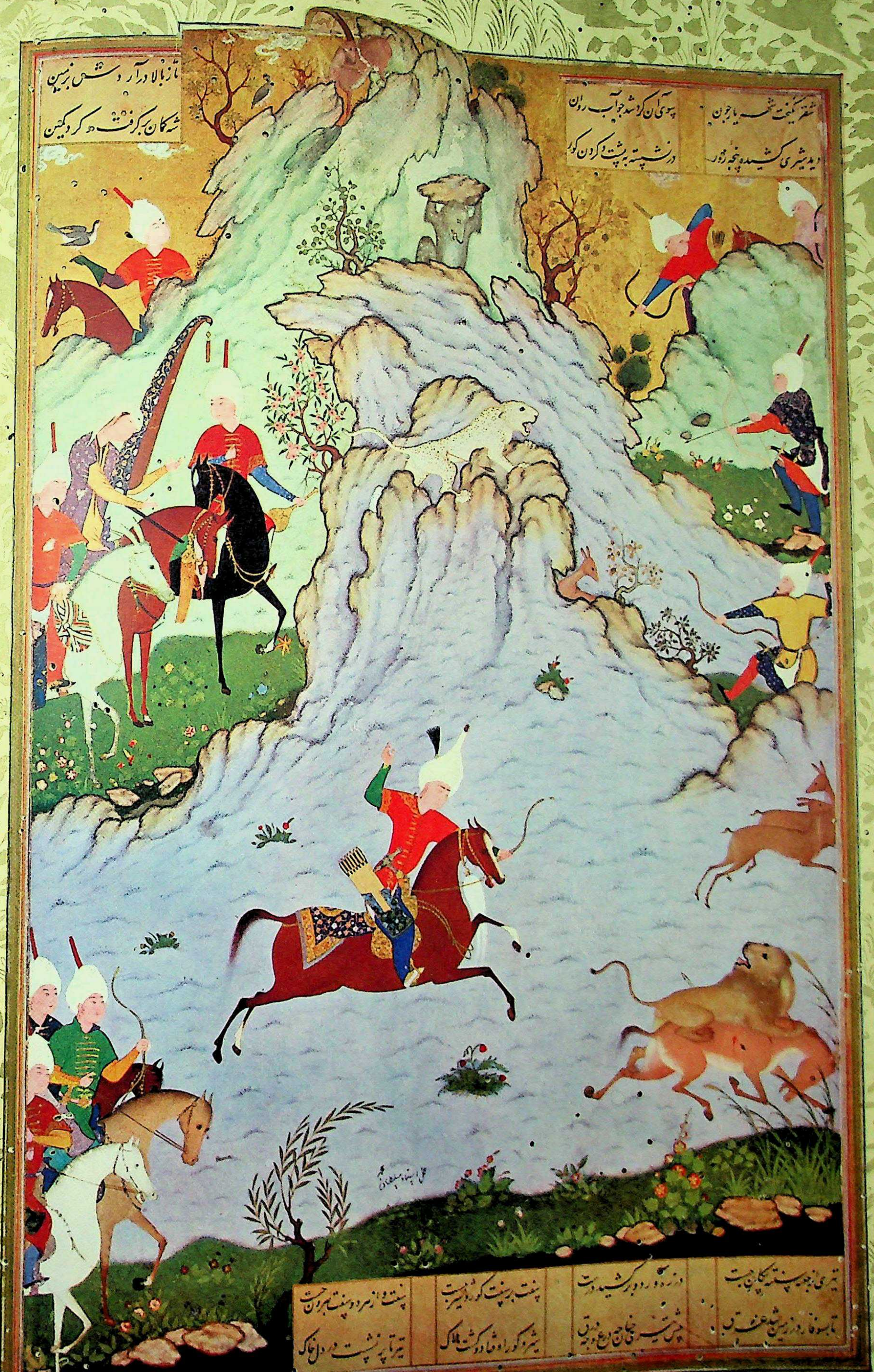

تا ز بالا درآردش بر زمین
شه کمان برگرفت و کرد کمین
دید شیری کشیده پنجه زور
سوی آن کوه شد چو آب روان
در نشسته به پشت و گردن گور
پشت بر پشت گور و شیر بدوخت
تیر تا پر نشست در دل خاک

PLATE XVI

Bahram hunting the wild ass

By Muzaffar Ali